JUNE 20th ISSUE, 1924
VOL. XLVII No. 2

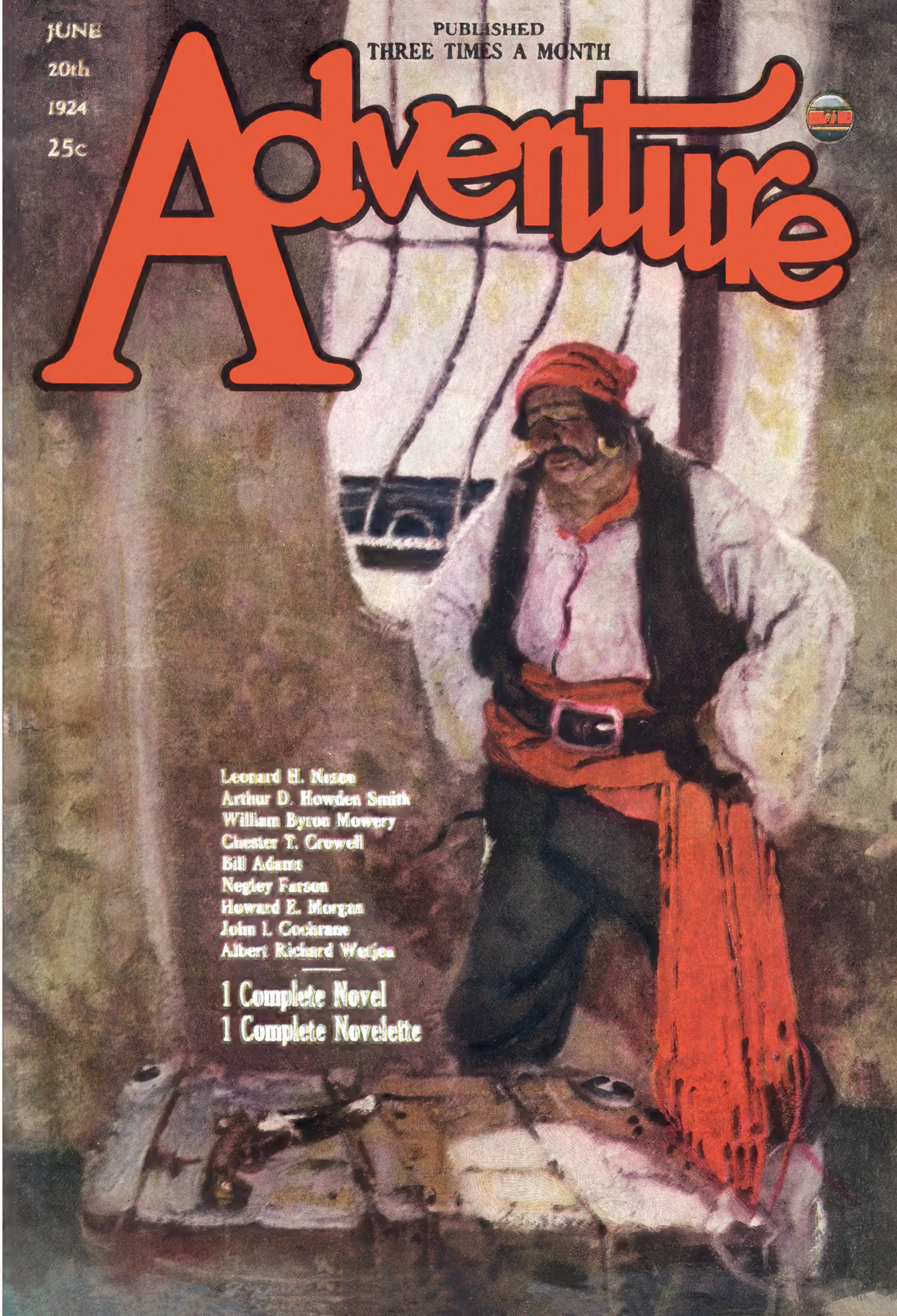
ADVENTURE

25 Cents

JUNE
20th
1924
25c

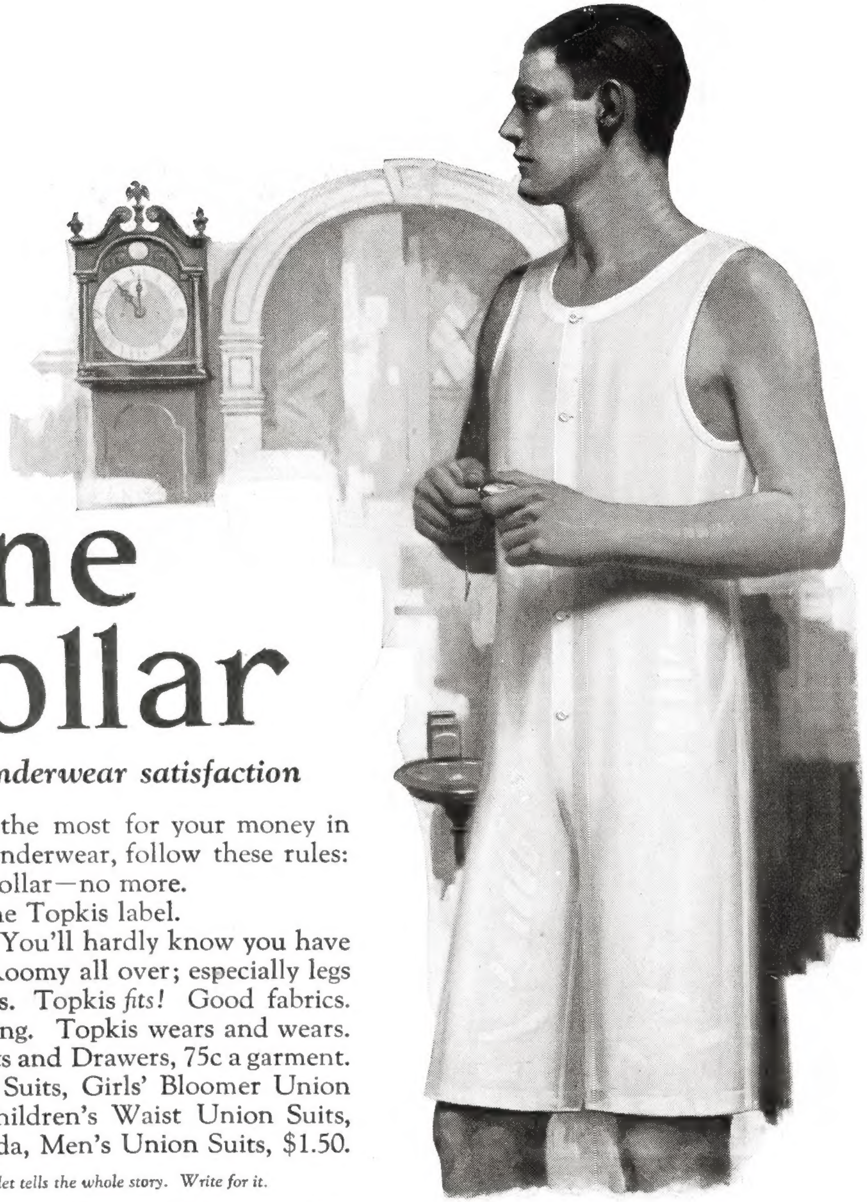
PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure



Leonard H. Nason
Arthur D. Howden Smith
William Byron Mowery
Chester T. Crowell
Bill Adams
Negley Farson
Howard E. Morgan
John I. Cochrane
Albert Richard Wetjen

1 Complete Novel
1 Complete Novelette



One Dollar

—for underwear satisfaction

TO GET the most for your money in athletic underwear, follow these rules:

Pay One Dollar—no more.

Look for the Topkis label.

Comfort? You'll hardly know you have Topkis on! Roomy all over; especially legs and arm-holes. Topkis *fits!* Good fabrics. Sound tailoring. Topkis wears and wears.

Men's Shirts and Drawers, 75c a garment. Boys' Union Suits, Girls' Bloomer Union Suits, and Children's Waist Union Suits, 75c. In Canada, Men's Union Suits, $1.50.

Free Booklet tells the whole story. Write for it.

TOPKIS BROTHERS COMPANY, Wilmington, Del.
General Sales Offices: 350 Broadway, New York City

Ask for TOPKIS Underwear. *Look for the TOPKIS label.*

Buy Topkis by the Box—Six union suits for $6. Some men pay as much for three suits—but they don't know Topkis.

TOPKIS

Athletic Underwear

Where does the ice come from?

One advantage of a big organization is that it includes men who have specialized along many different lines. Thus, no matter what your electrical problem may be, there is someone among the 100,000 men and women of the General Electric Company who *knows* and is at your service.

Ice used to come from lakes and ponds—sometimes clean and sometimes not.

Today it comes from an artificial ice plant where electric hoists and ammonia compressors are operated by G-E motors. Jack Frost worked cheaply, but so does the G-E motor; and *it* works every day.

GENERAL ELECTRIC

ADVENTURE
June 20th, 1924

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 47
Number 2

ED. PINAUD'S
LILAC

Exquisite.

ED. PINAUD'S *famous* Lilac Vegetal

Is the world's favorite perfume. Exquisite in quality; used for handkerchief, atomizer and bath. Women love it.

Lilac is also the best, most refined perfume for men. After shaving it is a real delight. Use it also after the shower bath.

ED. PINAUD'S HAIR TONIC

The original French Eau de Quinine, this superior preparation appeals to all men and women of refinement. Beautifies the hair and keeps the scalp healthy and clean.

Apply ED. PINAUD'S hair tonic faithfully and watch your hair improve. Wonderful for dandruff and falling hair. Notice its exquisite fragrance.

Write today for samples of these two famous toilet necessities. Send 10c to our American Offices, write name and address plainly. Try the samples then buy of any dealer.

Parfumerie **ED. PINAUD**
DEPT. A
American Import Offices
ED. PINAUD BLDG. NEW YORK

Try also ED. PINAUD'S latest creations:
Elixir Shampoo, **perfect quality, perfumed with the refined Eau de Quinine odor.**
Bath Salts, **for perfuming the bath with the fragrance of fresh Lilac blossoms.**

Adventure

Registered in
U. S. Patent Office

June 20 ~ 1924
Vol. XLVII
No 2

Published Three Times a Month by The Ridgway Company

J. H. GANNON, President C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York, N. Y.
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 in advance **Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents**

Foreign postage, $3.00 additional. Canadian postage, 90 cents.

Trade-Mark Registered; Copyright, 1924, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain. Entered at Stationers' Hall, London, England.

The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Contents for June 20th, 1924, Issue

Swain's Chase *A Complete Novel* . . . . Arthur D. Howden Smith 1
Viking-farers—the pursuit of *Olvir Rosta.*

The Rising Sun *Apprentice Nights I* *Verse* . . . . . Bill Adams 80

As Gentlemen Should . . . . William Byron Mowery 82
Labrador—*Bert Avery* pulls the strings.

Uncle Dudley Kind o' Scouts Round . . . . . . Chester T. Crowell 86
New York—Texas tricks.

The Judgment Tree of Daniel Boone *Early Days* . . . Raymond W. Thorp 95

Exactly . . . . Albert Richard Wetjen 96
Cape Town bound—they said the captain was hard-boiled.

The Slaves of the Lamp *Verse* . . . . Alanson Skinner 102

Necklaces and Dan Wheeler *A Four-Part Story* *Part III* . John I. Cochrane 103
New York—war on the "Spark Gang."

**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from preceding page)

The Big Little Man . . . . **Howard E. Morgan** 135
Hillbillies—some come tough and others come tougher.

The Mean Second *A Slant on Life* . . . . . . **Bill Adams** 143
Sea—a bucko mate.

The Common Grief . . . . **Negley Farson** 146
Lumber camp—a cat and a quarrel.

A Morning Call ***A Complete Novelette*** . . . . . . **Leonard H. Nason** 150
World War—a surprize attack.

The Camp-Fire **A free-to-all meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers** 177

Camp-Fire Stations 183

Lost Trails 183

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader 183

Ask Adventure 185
A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising sixty-three geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons Past and Present, Salt and Fresh Water Fishing, Tropical Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, United States and Foreign; and American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung 191

The Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . **Will Crawford**

Cover Design . . . . **J. W. Schlaikjer**

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of *Adventure*, published three times a month at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1924. State of New York, County of New York, *ss.* Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared ARTHUR S. HOFFMAN, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Editor of the *Adventure* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. Editor, ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, 223 Spring Street, New York City; Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, JAMES F. BIRMINGHAM, 223 Spring Street, New York City. 2. That the owner is: (If the publication is owned by an individual his name and address, or if owned by more than one individual the name and address of each, should be given below; if the publication is owned by a corporation the name of the corporation and the names and addresses of the stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of the total amount of stock should be given.) *Owner:* THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. *Stockholders:* FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, 15 Exchange Place, Jersey City, N. J.; stockholder of FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY, THE BUTTERICK COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City; stockholders of BUTTERICK COMPANY, GEORGE B. BLACK, 812 Lincoln Avenue, Mendota, Ill.; S. R. LATSHAW, Butterick Building, New York City; LAURA J. O'LOUGHLIN, 514 West 114th Street, New York City; MRS. ARETHUSA POND, 575 Riverside Drive, New York City; ABBY L. WILDER, 43 5th Avenue, New York City; B. F. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City; C. D. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City; G. W. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City. 3. *That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding* 1 *per cent. or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are:* (*If there are none, so state.*) None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is (This information is required from daily publications only.) ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of March, 1924. WM. DEWAR, JR., Notary Public, Kings County No. 172, Kings County Register 4193. New York County Clerk No. 458, Register No. 4038-A. (*My commission expires March* 30, 1924.) (SEAL.) Form 3526.—Ed. 1922.

"THE AIR IS FULL OF THINGS YOU SHOULDN'T MISS"

Your "B" Battery is the life of your Radio Set

THE broadcasting stations are transmitting wonderful programs for enjoyment in your home. Here a wonderful aria is being sung by a famous soprano—there a radio drama is being given. Here is a play-by-play report of some important athletic event—there an address of national importance. The successful reproduction of all these is absolutely dependent upon the quality of your "B" Battery, for without its silent, energizing current your set would be lifeless—mute.

The makers of Eveready "B" Batteries have a thirty-year background of experience in battery making. They have expended millions in money and time, in men and methods, in machinery and laboratory research, to bring the dry cell to its highest point of efficiency. They have pioneered and assisted in the march of radio, and out of this broad experience have contributed that marvel of vitality and endurance—the Eveready "B" Battery—that your radio set may pulsate with life and bring forth thrilling speech and rippling music.

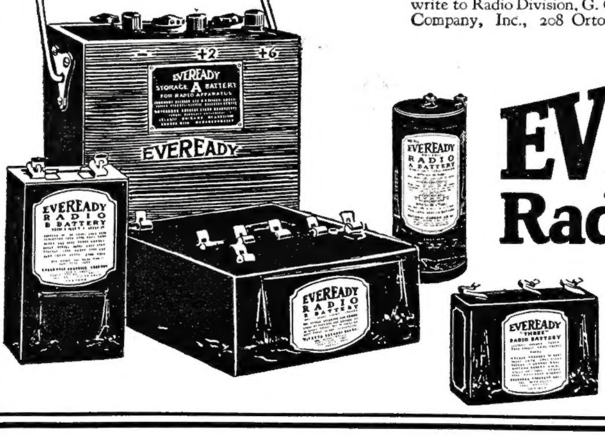
Be good to your set. Equip it with Eveready "B" Batteries that will serve and endure. Use Eveready Batteries throughout your set, for there is an Eveready Radio Battery for every radio use—the right battery by test and proof. Insist on Eveready Batteries—they last longer.

Eveready "B" Battery No. 766
22½ volts. Six Fahnestock Spring Clip Terminals, giving variable voltage from 16½ to 22½ volts, in 1½-volt steps. Length, 6¾ in.; width, 4⅛ in.; height, 3 3/16 in. Weight, 5 lbs.

Manufactured and guaranteed by

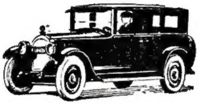
NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, Inc.
Headquarters for Radio Battery Information
New York San Francisco
Canadian National Carbon Co., Limited, Toronto, Ontario

Informative and money-saving booklets on radio batteries sent free on request. If you have any questions regarding radio batteries, write to Radio Division, G. C. Furness, Manager, National Carbon Company, Inc., 208 Orton Street, Long Island City, N. Y.



EVEREADY
Radio Batteries
–they last longer

What Brake Lining came on *your* Car?

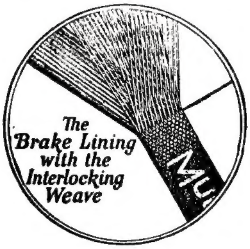


YOU may not know what make of lining your manufacturer supplied. But it is mighty important to know that your brakes stay ready to meet each new emergency of modern motoring.

Multibestos, the Brake Lining with the Interlocking Weave, is so dependable at all times, and *lasts for such a long time,* that the makers of a majority of America's cars specify it as original factory equipment.

When you have your brakes relined, ask for Multibestos.

MULTIBESTOS
THE BRAKE LINING
with the Interlocking Weave


The Brake Lining with the Interlocking Weave
Mu

New Auto Maps, only 10c

RAND McNALLY & CO., America's best-known map makers, have just printed a new series of absolutely up-to-date Touring Maps, covering every state. By special arrangement, for a short period, we can send you any states you wish for only 10c per map, in return for address of dealer or shop where you have your brakes relined. Order now. Specify sections or states you want.

MULTIBESTOS COMPANY
Dept. A. F. 6, Walpole, Mass., U. S. A.

50¢
Spur Tie
Pat. Jan. 29 1924 Reg U.S. Pat. Off.

HOLDS ITS SHAPE!

ALL day long—or through the evening dance—the Spur Tie holds its shape. Doesn't curl, roll or wrinkle. An exclusive patented feature makes this possible.

ALL TIED FOR YOU

The Spur Tie comes all tied for you by hand. A host of patterns—two sizes—and either pointed or square end models, to choose from.

BE SURE YOU GET THE GENUINE
LOOK FOR THE NAME SPUR ON THE TIE
Write for Style Book C
HEWES & POTTER, Boston, Mass.
Makers of BULL-DOG
Suspenders and Garters, Guaranteed 365 Days
Bull-Dog Belts and Vestoff Suspenders
On the Pacific Coast
Paul B. Hay, 120 Battery St., San Francisco, Cal.

Cincinnati's finest hotel has won the name "Good Morning Hotel" because every employee greets every guest with real cordiality and tries sincerely to make Hotel Sinton a good substitute for home.

Hotel Sinton
the hotel of character. in the city of character.
CINCINNATI

Accommodations for 1200 Guests
Every Room with Bath and Servidor

Management John L. Horgan

Bathe the skin the Fairy way!

A BATH with Fairy Soap is a delightful experience! The rich, foamy, delicately fragrant lather is produced in a jiffy.

And you really are clean and refreshed and invigorated—because Fairy Soap acts that way on the skin. The whitest soap in the world—and as pure as it is white! White clear through. Nothing in it but the finest, purest ingredients. A real aid to permanent skin health, whether used for the toilet or bath.

And remember—the oval cake is economical because it wears down to a thin wafer without breaking.

It's white! It's pure! It floats!

FAIRY SOAP

Qualify Yourself to Earn $50 to $500 a week WRITING Advertisements

Are you ambitious? Do you hope to become a leader in the profession that offers every opportunity? Men and women who can write real selling "copy" are scarce. They earn big salaries and enjoy their work.

Get a copy of this book and be your own teacher. No matter where you live you can study it and actually work at advertising production.

This Book Gives You the Very Best Instruction

FIRST PRINCIPLES OF ADVERTISING

"First Principles of Advertising," by Wilbur D. Nesbit, is the cream of his own successful experience writing advertisements. Mr. Nesbit is now and has been for many years Vice-President of the William H. Rankin Company, is the author of several well known and deservedly popular books. His work is inseparably identified with the success of some of the largest industrial and mercantile concerns. Each chapter in the book he now offers is a real practical lesson. The book actually tells you how to begin at the beginning; gives you the valuable groundwork, and condenses many months of "finding out" into definite practice.

Send For Your Copy Now

Send $1.50 and receive the book at once. If not satisfied, return it within one week and get your money back. Use the coupon below and get the book by return mail so you can begin studying immediately. Ask about other Gregg books listed below.

GREGG PUBLISHING COMPANY
285 Fifth Ave., N. Y.

Enclosed find $1.50 for which send me postpaid "First Principles of Advertising." I am interested in the following books also (check them):

- ☐ "Business Letter Writing," $3.00.
- ☐ "Personality"—Studies in Personal Development, $1.50.
- ☐ "Character Analysis from Handwriting," $2.60.
- ☐ "Secretarial Studies," $2.00.

Name . . . .

Address . . . .

City . . . . *State* . . . .

Let *Us* Pay Your Vacation Bills

DURING the next few months hundreds of men will earn all the vacation money they need as special representatives of ADVENTURE, THE DELINEATOR, EVERYBODY'S and THE DESIGNER.

Thousands upon thousands of subscriptions are due for renewal *right now*. Let us show you how easily you can get the orders in your community—*at a big profit*.

No experience is necessary. You begin making money as soon as you hear from us. Send the coupon for full particulars—*now!*

Manager, Staff Agencies Division,
Box 1084, Butterick Building, New York City

Name ....

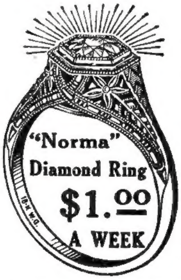
Street ....

City .... State ....

Genuine Diamond RING

Marvelous Value

Brilliant Blue White, Perfect Cut Diamond



$37.50

Cash or Credit

Mounting is 18-K Solid White Gold, Diamond set in hexagon top. A popular Engagement Ring. Cased in handsome ring box. Delivered on first payment of $1.00; then $1.00 a Week thereafter.

Money Back If Not Satisfied

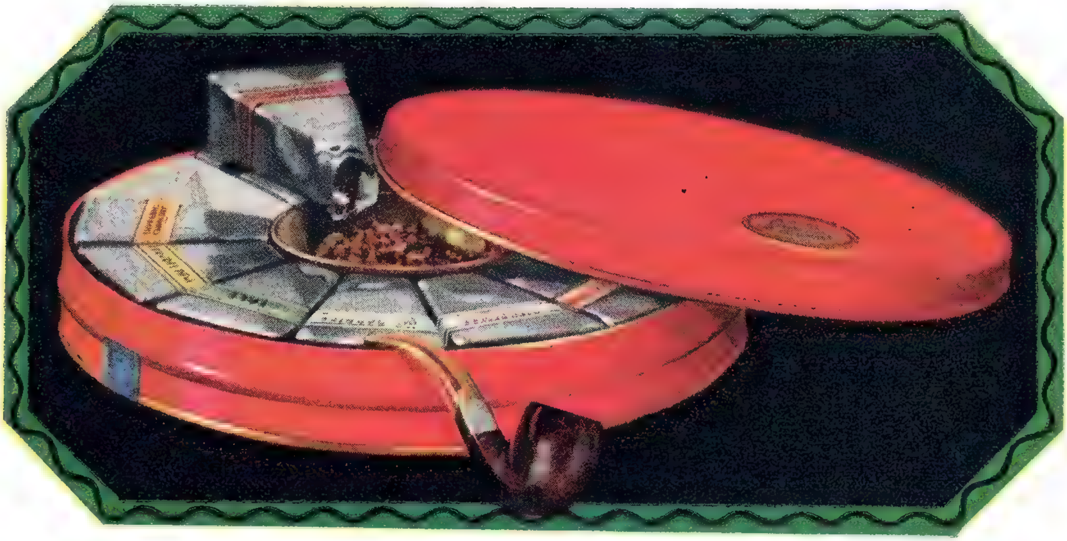
LOFTIS BROS. & CO. EST'D 1858

THE OLD RELIABLE ORIGINAL CREDIT JEWELERS
DEPT. A-224
108 N. State St., Chicago, Ill.
Stores in Leading Cities

EARN MONEY AT HOME

YOU can make $15 to $60 weekly in your spare time writing show cards. No canvassing or soliciting. We instruct you by our new simple Directograph System, supply you with work and pay you cash each week. Write today for full particulars and free booklet.

WEST-ANGUS SHOW CARD SERVICE LIMITED
Authorized Capital $1,250,000.00
204 Colborne Building, Toronto, Can.



Get this, men-

A complete assortment of the world's finest smoking tobaccos—sent to any smoker anywhere—*on 10 days approval*

A new idea for Pipe-Smokers: 12 famous tobaccos, packed in a handsome Humidor—shipped to you direct to help you find the soul-mate for your pipe.

GUARANTEED BY

The American Tobacco Co

MOST men have written their John Hancocks on a lot of "dotted lines." But, if you're a pipe-smoker, we'll wager that you've never signed a fairer, sweeter contract than the little coupon at the bottom of this page.

Just a few strokes of your pen—and you can end your quest of years for a perfect smoking tobacco.

But we are getting ahead of our story.

A Test of the "12 Best" *for only* $1.50

If you were to try all 12 of these tobaccos in full size packages, the cost would be:

Blue Boar . . .	.25
Capstan	.30
Imperial Cube Cut .	.30
Herbert Tareyton . .	.25
Old English Curve Cut	.15
The Garrick . . .	.30
Carlton Club . . .	.15
Yale Mixture . . .	.25
Falk's Serene Mixture	.15
Three States . . .	.25
Will's Latakia . . .	.45
Louisiana Perique	.25
Total . .	$3.05

But through the *Humidor Sampler* you get a liberal "get acquainted" quantity of each for $1.50

The average pipe-smoker is the greatest little experimenter in the world. He's forever trying a "new one," confident that some day he'll find the real affinity for his pipe.

So we created the *Humidor Sampler* to meet his needs.

Into a bright red lacquered humidor case, we have packed an assortment of twelve famous smoking tobaccos—covering the whole range of smoking tobacco taste.

There are myriads of different *brands* of smoking tobaccos on the market. But of them all, there are 12 distinctive blends which, in our opinion, stand in a class by themselves for superlative flavor, aroma and quality.

These twelve decisive blends—the twelve "primary colors" of tobaccos—have been selected for the Humidor Sampler. When you have tried these twelve, you have tried the best; if your tobacco-ideal is to be found anywhere, it must be one of these "Twelve Best."

Ten-Day Approval Offer

We are eager to send the Humidor assortment to any smoker, anywhere, on ten days' approval.

Send no money. Just sign and mail the coupon. That will bring you the Humidor assortment direct from our factories to your den. When the postman brings the package, deposit $1.50 with him, plus postage.

If a ten-day try-out of these tobaccos doesn't give you more real pipe pleasure than you've ever had before, simply return the Humidor, and you'll get your $1.50 and the postage back *pronto*—and pleasantly.

Send No Money—Just Mail Coupon

The American Tobacco Co., Inc., Marburg Branch
Dept. 104, Baltimore, Md.

Please send me, on 10 days' approval, one of your Humidor Samplers of twelve different smoking tobaccos. I will pay postman $1.50 (plus postage) on receipt—with the understanding that if I am not satisfied I may return Humidor in 10 days and you agree to refund $1.50 and postage by return mail.

Name..

Address..

City.. State..........................

Note:—If you expect to be out when postman calls you may enclose $1.50 with coupon and Humidor will be sent to you postpaid.

100 cigarettes for 15¢

GENUINE

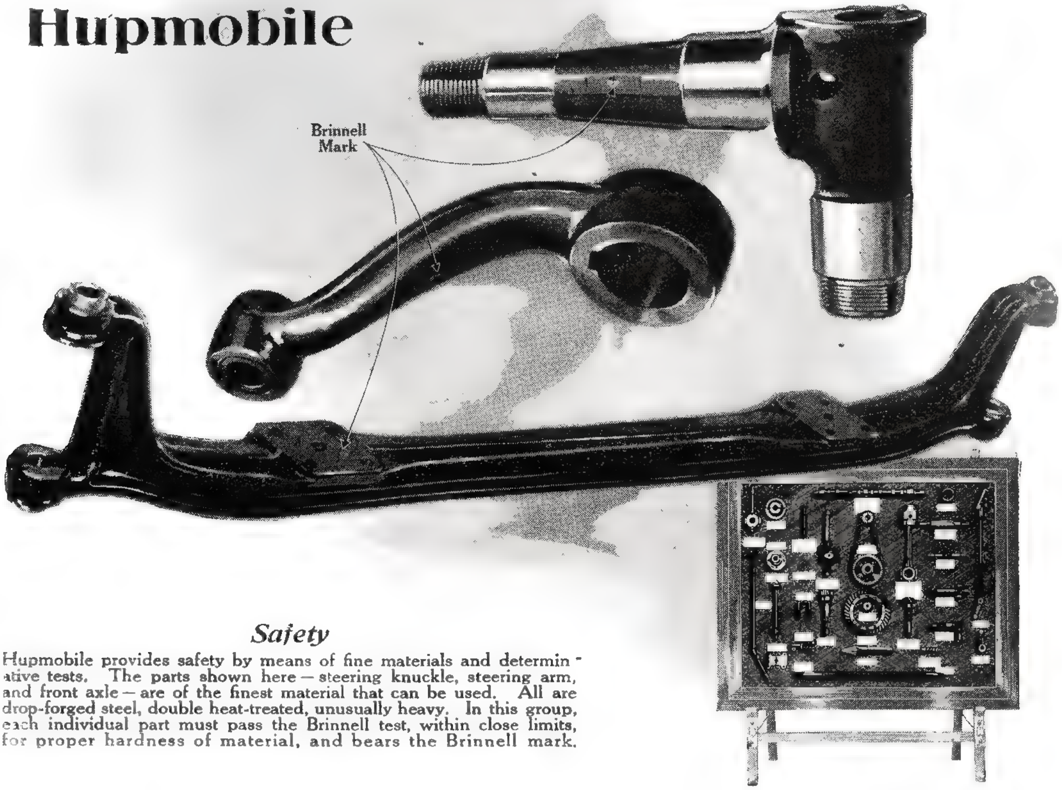
BULL DURHAM

Settle the cigarette question by rolling your own from BULL. You get more flavor, more tobacco taste, more enjoyment — and much more for your money—

2 bags for 15c

Guaranteed by The American Tobacco Co. INCORPORATED

Hupmobile



Safety

Hupmobile provides safety by means of fine materials and determinative tests. The parts shown here — steering knuckle, steering arm, and front axle — are of the finest material that can be used. All are drop-forged steel, double heat-treated, unusually heavy. In this group, each individual part must pass the Brinnell test, within close limits, for proper hardness of material, and bears the Brinnell mark.

Now You Can See

Why This is the Best-Value Car You Can Buy

Any Hupmobile owner would tell you that each dollar he paid for his car brought him the best and largest 100 cents worth of superior motoring it is possible to purchase.

He has learned the significance of those thorough and costly processes of manufacture that have always characterized Hupmobile methods. He **knows** now what real motor car values are.

What he knows through ownership, you can discover through observation.

Those "invisible costs," that have so much to do with the proverbially substantial Hupmobile qualities have now been made visible for you.

Step into the nearest Hupmobile salesroom and see the parts display.

The tickets on the parts tell in black type what they are for, how they are made, and what they are made of.

The same ticket, in red type, tells a similar story about similar parts in cars not so carefully made.

If these cars could match the Hupmobile in excellence and reliability of performance, in durability and economy of up-keep—you might then be justified in laying your money on the "red."

But wisdom says black is the safe and sane color when it comes to investing hard-earned money in an automobile.

Where one is safe, Four others pay

Don't pay Pyorrhea's price—brush your teeth with Forhan's

Every man and woman is in danger of Pyorrhea. According to reliable dental statistics, four persons out of every five past forty, and thousands younger, too, are victims.

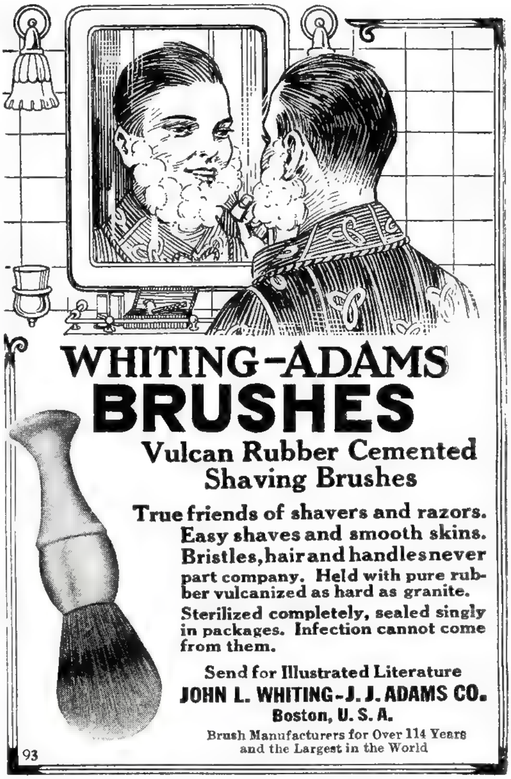
Are you willing to pay the penalty—lost teeth and shattered health? If not, don't neglect your teeth. Visit your dentist regularly for tooth and gum inspection, and make Forhan's For the Gums *your* dentifrice. It is most pleasant to the taste.

At all druggists, 35c and 60c in tubes.

Forhan's
FOR THE GUMS

More than a tooth paste—it checks Pyorrhea

Formula of R.J. Forhan DDS
Forhan Company
New York



WHITING-ADAMS BRUSHES

Vulcan Rubber Cemented Shaving Brushes

True friends of shavers and razors. Easy shaves and smooth skins. Bristles, hair and handles never part company. Held with pure rubber vulcanized as hard as granite. Sterilized completely, sealed singly in packages. Infection cannot come from them.

Send for Illustrated Literature
JOHN L. WHITING-J. J. ADAMS CO.
Boston, U. S. A.
Brush Manufacturers for Over 114 Years and the Largest in the World

93

FRECKLES

Now Is the Time to Get Rid of These Ugly Spots

There's no longer the slightest need of feeling ashamed of your freckles, as Othine—double strength—is guaranteed to remove these homely spots.

Simply get an ounce of Othine from any druggist and apply a little of it night and morning and you should soon see that even the worst freckles have begun to disappear, while the lighter ones have vanished entirely. It is seldom that more than an ounce is needed to completely clear the skin and gain a beautiful, clear complexion.

Be sure to ask for double-strength Othine, as this is sold under guarantee of money back if it fails to remove freckles.

LEARN Electricity Great School of Coyne—complete in 3½ months. Big outlay of electrical equipment.

Free Railroad Fare

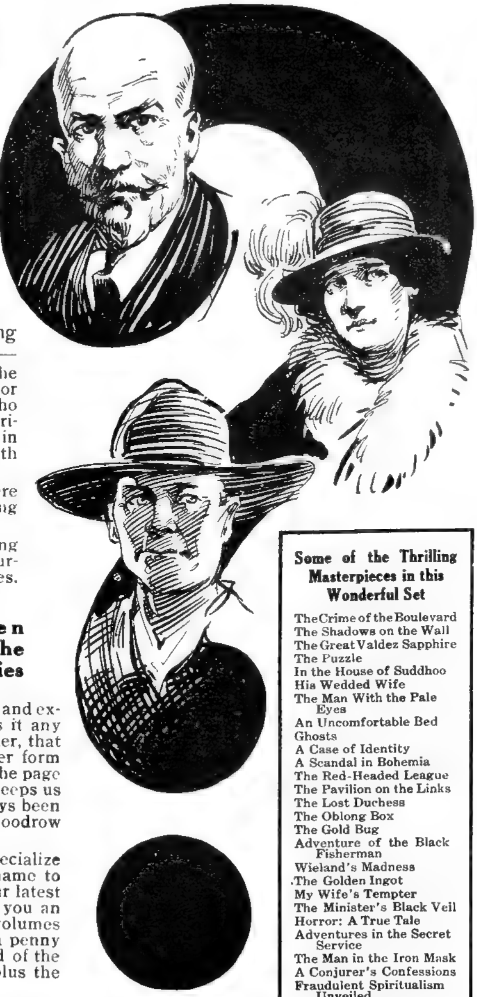
Enter anytime. Special limited offer. Drafting and Radio Free. *Send for big free catalog.* Act now!

Coyne Electrical School—Dept. A-141
1300-1310 West Harrison Street, Chicago, Illinois

Big Money Writing photoplays stories poems, songs. Send for free copy America's greatest magazine for writers. Tells you how to write and sell

WRITER'S DIGEST, 607 Butler Building, Cincinnati, Ohio

Which one would *you* guess killed Monsieur Rovere?



Here are the facts:

Monsieur Rovere, a well-to-do recluse living in Paris, was found dead in his apartment—assassinated. Apparently, there was no motive. The dead man had lived entirely alone, without friends or visitors—*except* for an aristocratic old gentleman who had been seen with him occasionally, and the mysterious "Woman in Black." Then there was the man in the sombrero hat—what was *his* connection with Monsieur Rovere?

Not a single clue could be found; the police were baffled. Then detective Bernadet suggested a daring scientific experiment.

But let Jules Claretie tell you the whole amazing story—it is one of the great masterpieces in the four-volume library of the World's Best Mystery Stories.

WANTED

Men and women who appreciate the Best Mystery Stories

Back in the days of "fang and claw" our ancestors had more thrills and excitement in getting even a square meal than there was food in it. Is it any wonder, then, in these days of easy chairs, and policemen on the corner, that we thirst for the excitement they had—that we *need* thrills? No other form of literature holds such gripping interest and gives so many thrills to the page as the great mystery story. Nothing else stimulates the wits and keeps us as alert and refreshed. That is why great mystery stories have always been the favorite means of relaxation and recreation for such men as Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt and Uncle Joe Cannon.

Do *you* want new thrills, fresh excitement, novel adventures? We specialize in publishing the best stories of mystery and we want to add your name to our FREE Mailing List so that you may receive announcements of our latest book bargains. If you will send us your name *now*, we will make you an amazing Introductory Offer. We will send you four handsome big volumes of the World's Best Mystery Stories for which you need not pay a penny beyond a trifling sum to help cover the costs of this offer. Instead of the regular price of $6.00, all you pay for *all four* volumes is only $1.98 plus the few cents postage!

Some of the Thrilling Masterpieces in this Wonderful Set

- The Crime of the Boulevard
- The Shadows on the Wall
- The Great Valdez Sapphire
- The Puzzle
- In the House of Suddhoo
- His Wedded Wife
- The Man With the Pale Eyes
- An Uncomfortable Bed
- Ghosts
- A Case of Identity
- A Scandal in Bohemia
- The Red-Headed League
- The Pavilion on the Links
- The Lost Duchess
- The Oblong Box
- The Gold Bug
- Adventure of the Black Fisherman
- Wieland's Madness
- The Golden Ingot
- My Wife's Tempter
- The Minister's Black Veil
- Horror: A True Tale
- Adventures in the Secret Service
- The Man in the Iron Mask
- A Conjurer's Confessions
- Fraudulent Spiritualism Unveiled
- Inspector Bucket's Job

etc., etc.

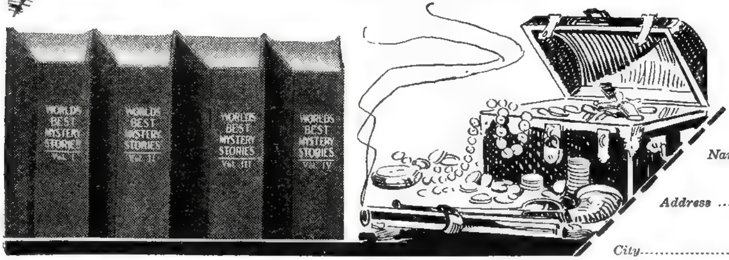
Get Your Name on Our FREE Mailing List

Just think! Four wonderful volumes of the greatest masterpieces of mystery and detective stories ever written—stories by such famous authors as Edgar Allan Poe, Rudyard Kipling, A. Conan Doyle, Wilkie Collins, Robert Louis Stevenson, Charles Dickens, de Maupassant, Arthur Train, and many others—and ALL for only $1.98 plus postage.

The four volumes are handsomely bound in maroon library cloth, with frontispiece illustrations—nearly 1500 pages in the set. Never has such an offer been made before! But you must take advantage of it AT ONCE as it is made for a short time only in order to secure new names for our FREE Mailing List.

Send No Money Not a penny in advance! Just the coupon below brings all four of these great volumes to your home. On arrival, pay the postman only $1.98 plus postage. And even this special price will be refunded to you in full and without question if after examining the books you do not think that this is the greatest bargain ever received and that these are the finest mystery stories you have ever read.

But mail only the coupon now. Do it TODAY, as the publishers must reserve the right to withdraw this offer at any time, without notice. Address: Mystery Story Club, 30 Irving Place, New York City.


WORLD'S BEST MYSTERY STORIES VOL. I
WORLD'S BEST MYSTERY STORIES VOL. II
WORLD'S BEST MYSTERY STORIES VOL. III
WORLD'S BEST MYSTERY STORIES VOL. IV

A-6-20-24

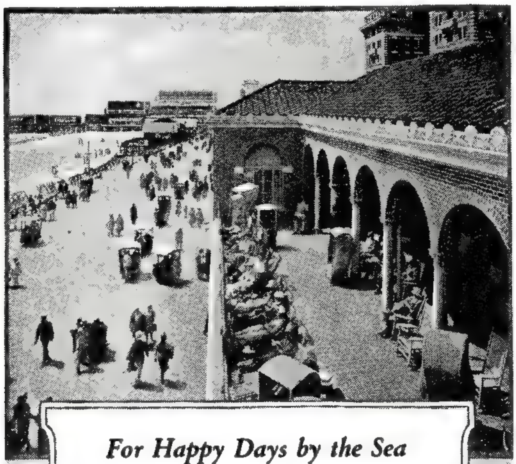
Mystery Story Club
30 Irving Place
New York City

You may add my name to your FREE Mailing List, to receive announcements of your latest Mystery Story bargains. In accordance with your special Introductory Offer you may send me at once the four-volume set of the World's Best Mystery Stories, regular price $6.00, for which I will pay the postman only $1.98 plus the few cents postage on arrival. You agree to refund my money if I care to return the books within 7 days.

Name ....

Address ....

City..*State* ....



For Happy Days by the Sea

CHALFONTE-HADDON HALL

ATLANTIC CITY

Under their broad deck porches, along the famous Boardwalk, the world passes in review. Merry crowds throng the broad white beach. The sea rolls in, bringing health and tingling life in its salty tang and soothing sound.

A thousand fascinating shops and amusements claim your interest. Or you can play golf on a sporty course, go yachting or fishing.

Then back to Chalfonte-Haddon Hall with keen appetite for a tempting meal, desire for perfect comfort and the companionship of delightful people.

For more than fifty years these two hospitable, homelike hotels, now combined in ownership and management, have been the choice of cultivated interesting people, bent on happy, health-giving days by the sea.

American Plan Only. Always Open
Write for illustrated folder and rates

LEEDS and LIPPINCOTT
COMPANY

"How does *He* do it?"

If you knew Paul Johnson, you would ask the same question, "How does *he* do it?"

For Johnson makes only a modest salary—still he dresses better, has a better home, with more comforts and luxuries than other men. Yet it isn't because he economizes—if anything, he spends more freely than his friends.

Needless to say, Johnson has no Aladdin's lamp. But he has what every man has—spare time. And all Johnson has done to earn $5 to $20 *extra* every week is devote a few spare hours to sending us the new and renewal orders to ADVENTURE, EVERYBODY'S, THE DELINEATOR and THE DESIGNER, from his community.

There are hundreds of Paul Johnsons in the United States. But many more will be needed to take care of the thousands of subscriptions that will be ordered during the next few months. Follow our helpful suggestions and you will quickly add $5 to $20 to *your* week's wages.

It will cost you only the postage to get full particulars. The coupon below insures you the same helpful cooperation that has made hundreds of men independent. Clip it out and mail it—*now!*

Box 1083, Butterick Bldg.
New York City

Please send me, without obligation, full particulars of your money-making plan.

Name ....

Street ....

City ....

State ....

How Do You Look In a Bathing Suit?

The good old swimming days are here. Oh, boy! But it's great to rip off the old shirt, into your suit and—SPLASH!! But what a shock to some of the poor girls when they see their heroes come out with flat chests and skinny arms instead of the big, husky frames they expected to see.

You Are Out of Luck

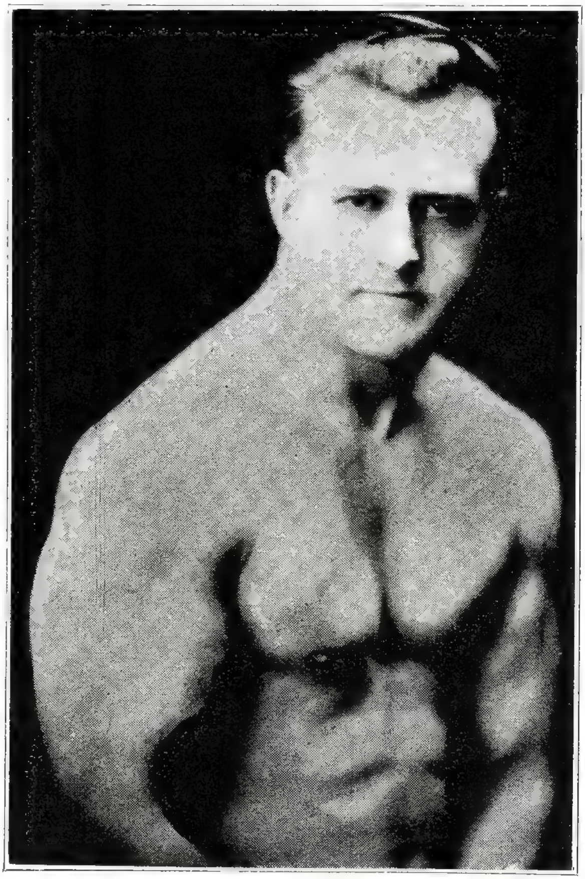
Don't try to make excuses. You are just out of luck. It's your own fault. You can't blame anyone but yourself. What are you going to do? She is going to find you out.

A Physique to Be Proud Of

It's not too late. Snap into it and I can save you yet. It means hard work and plenty of it, but—wait till you see the results.

The Muscle Builder

My job is to build muscle. That is why they call me The Muscle Builder. In just 30 days I am going to add one full inch to your biceps. Yes, and two inches on your chest in the same length of time. But that's only a starter. I am going to broaden out those shoulders and shoot a quiver up your old backbone. I am going to put a man's neck on you and a pair of legs to balance the strong sturdy body they support. You will have a spring to your step and a flash to your eye, radiating the dynamic life within you. Before summer is past you will never recognize your former self. You will have a strong, sturdy, virile body to be really proud of. You will be admired for your perfect manhood—while others are given glances of pity and scorn. This is no idle prattle, fellows. I don't just promise these things. I guarantee them. Are you with me? Let's go! Time is short and we have a job to do.



Earle E. Liederman
America's Leading Authority on Physical Education

Send for My New 64-page Book

"MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT"

IT IS FREE

It contains forty-three full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physiques. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration to you. It will thrill you through and through. All I ask is 10 cents to cover the cost of wrapping and mailing and it is yours to keep. This will not obligate you at all, but for the sake of your future health and happiness, do not put it off. Send today—right now, before you turn this page.

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN
Dept. 5006, 305 Broadway, New York City

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN
Dept. 5006, 305 Broadway, New York City

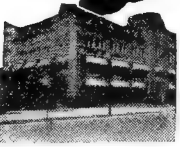
Dear Sir:—I enclose herewith 10 cents, for which you are to send me, without obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development."

Name.......................................

Street.......................................

City .... State ....

(Please write or print plainly)



High School Course in Two Years

This simplified, complete High School Course—specially prepared for home study by leading professors—meets all requirements for entrance to college and the leading professions.

30 Other Courses

Whether you need High School training or specialized instruction in any trade or profession the American School can help you. Check and mail coupon for Free Bulletin.

American School
Drexel Ave. and 58th Street
Dept. HA-4
Chicago

American School, Dept. HA-4, Drexel Ave. and 58th St., Chicago.
Send me full information on the subject checked and how you will help me win success.

- ....Architect
- ....Building Contractor
- ....Automobile Engineer
- ....Automobile Repairman
- ....Civil Engineer
- ....Structural Engineer
- ....Business Manager
- ....Cert. Public Accountant
- ....Accountant and Auditor
- ....Bookkeeper
- ....Draftsman and Designer
- ....Electrical Engineer
- ....Electric Light & Power
- ....General Education
- ....Vocational Guidance
- ....Business Law
- ....Lawyer
- ....Machine Shop Practice
- ....Photoplay Writer
- ....Mechanical Engineer
- ....Shop Superintendent
- ....Employment Manager
- ....Steam Engineer
- ....Foremanship
- ....Sanitary Engineer
- ....Surveyor (and Mapping)
- ....Telephone Engineer
- ....Telegraph Engineer
- ....High School Graduate
- ....Fire Insurance Expert
- ....Wireless Radio
- ....Undecided

Name..

Address..

1¢ Sale

Famous Radiex Phonograph Records

MAIL COUPON! NO MONEY NEEDED!

Only 69c for 1st Record, Next Record Only 1c

Choose any six or more records from list below. Average cost **only 35c each.** Have you ever heard of brand-new, double face, 10-inch records, all the very latest hits, being sold at this amazing low price? Radiex Records play beautifully on any phonograph. Send postcard or letter giving catalog numbers of any six or more records you want. Send no money. Simply pay the postman 35 cents per record and postage, when he delivers the records. Try the records 10 days and if you find them in any way inferior to 75c or $1.00 records return them and get your money back. But act quickly before this great advertising offer is withdrawn.

RADIEX CLUB Office AV-85, 598 Columbia Road Boston, Mass.

ORDER FROM THIS LIST—10 DAYS' TRIAL

STANDARD

Humoresque
Souvenir **4015**
(Violin Solos)

When You and I Were Young, Maggie **4011**
My Old Kentucky Home
(Songs)

Kathleen Mavourneen
Come Back To Erin **4012**
(Tenor Solos)

Medley of Old Time Songs, No. 1. **4010**
Medley of Old Time Songs, No. 2.
(Vocal Quartette)

Annie Laurie
Sally In Our Alley **4017**
(Vocal Quartette)

Washington Post
Our Director **4022**
(Marches, Band)

POPULAR SONGS

Dream Daddy **2137**
Sunshine Of Virginia

Smile Will Go Long, Long Way **2138**
It's A Man Every Time

Linger Awhile **2135**
If The Rest Of The World Don't Want You

Sittin' In A Corner
You Didn't Want Me **2127**

Last Night On The Back Porch **2126**
Every Night I Cry

Just A Girl Men Forget
Midnight Rose **2116**

Stay Home, Little Girl, Stay Home **2132**
When Lights Are Low

POPULAR DANCES

Linger Awhile
Momma **1198**

Dream Daddy
Bit By Bit **1195**

I Love You
Somebody's Wrong **1187**

Sittin' In A Corner
Sun Kist Rose **1186**

Last Night On The Back Porch **1185**
Sitting Pretty In A Pretty City

Irish Jigs and Reels, No. 1. **4016**
Irish Jigs and Reels, No. 2.

Scotch Bagpipe Selections **7001**
Scotch Regimental Marches

Be Good to Your EYES

Like the hair, skin and teeth, one's EYES are deserving of regular care. A few drops of *Murine,* night and morning, will drive away dullness and keep them clear, bright and healthy. Absolutely harmless.

Write Murine Company, Dept. 61, Chicago, for FREE Eye Care Book

MURINE FOR YOUR EYES

YOU TOO CAN PLAY THE HAWAIIAN GUITAR

JUST AS THE HAWAIIANS DO!

PLAY ALL THE LATEST HITS

After Your FIRST LESSON You Will Play a Complete Selection. We Guarantee That--

Our method is so simple, interesting and appealing that you begin in your first lesson to learn the famous Hawaiian Folk Song "ALOHA". Think how happy you will be when you surprise your friends by playing the fascinating Hawaiian Guitar.

Only Four Motions--
and You Master Them Quickly!

In a few minutes you acquire the four motions necessary to play *any* piece—after that a short period of practice and you will have mastered this weirdly sweet music. Complete course of 52 lessons includes FREE beautiful Hawaiian Guitar, necessary picks, steel bar, etc. No extras

No Previous Musical Knowledge Necessary

If you *never read a musical note in your life*—if you haven't even the slightest knowledge of music, we can quickly and positively teach you to play this wonderfully popular instrument. Don't be just a "listener" when you can *easily be the center of interest* among your friends. **Over 40,000 successful students.**

Just Mail a Post Card for Details

of our remarkable FREE Hawaiian Guitar Offer—simply write: "I am interested"—*but do it today.*

First Hawaiian Conservatory of Music, Inc.
Desk 34, 233 B'dway
(Woolworth Bldg.)
New York City

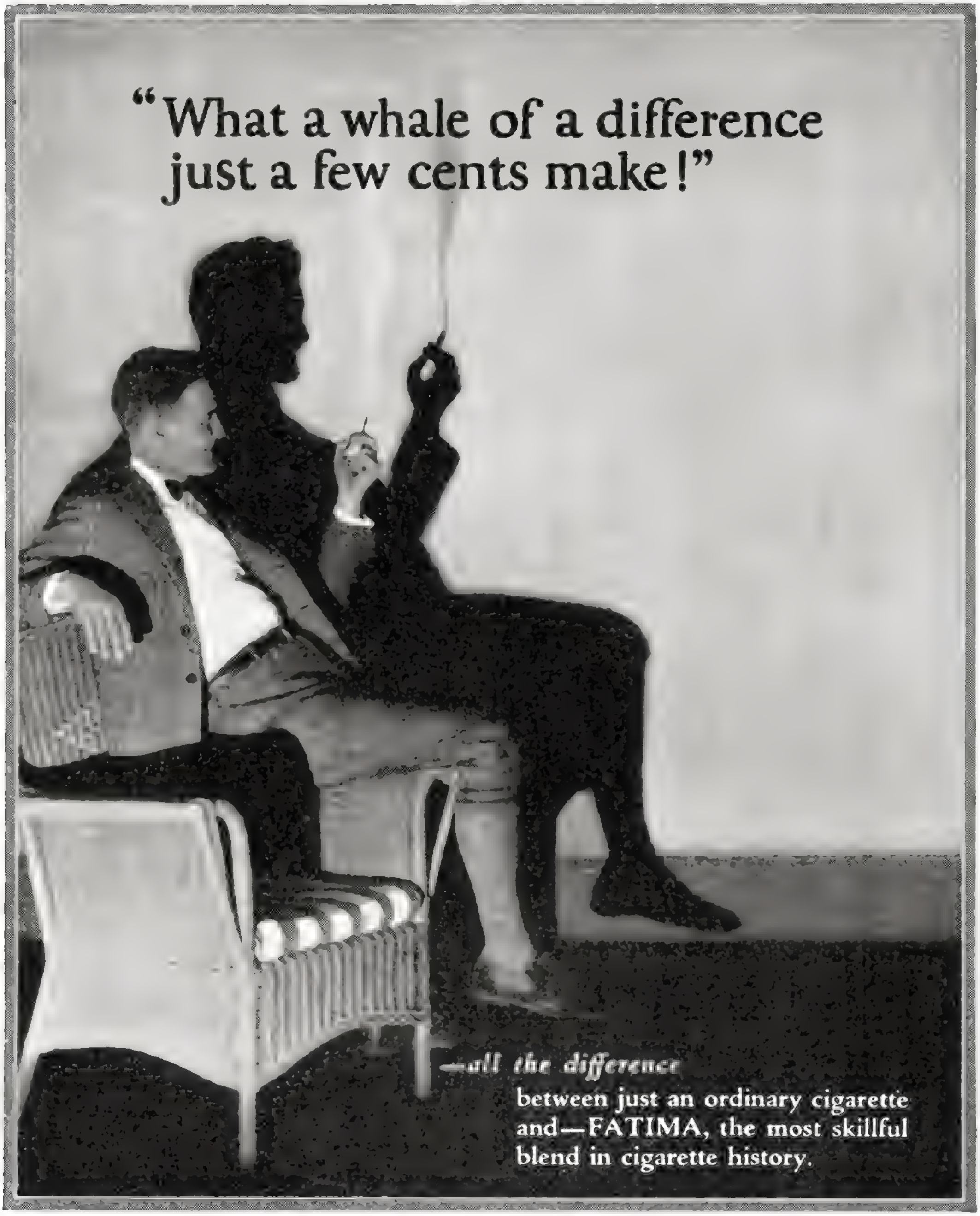
Special courses on Violin, Tenor-Banjo, Banjo-Ukulele and Ukulele.

FREE A Beautiful Hawaiian Guitar

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. Every Owner Buys Gold Initials for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples.
AMERICAN MONOGRAM CO., Dept. 85, East Orange, N. J.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG

We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poem to us at once. NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 401-H Romax Bldg., New York.


"What a whale of a difference just a few cents make!"
—all the difference
between just an ordinary cigarette and—FATIMA, the most skillful blend in cigarette history.

FORD RUNS 57 MILES ON GALLON OF GASOLINE

A new automatic and self-regulating device has been invented by John A. Stransky, 2297 Fourth St., Pukwana, South Dakota, with which automobiles have made from 40 to 57 miles on a gallon of gasoline. It removes all carbon and prevents spark plug trouble and overheating. It can be installed by anyone in five minutes Mr Stransky wants agents and is willing to send a sample at his own risk. Write him today—Adv.

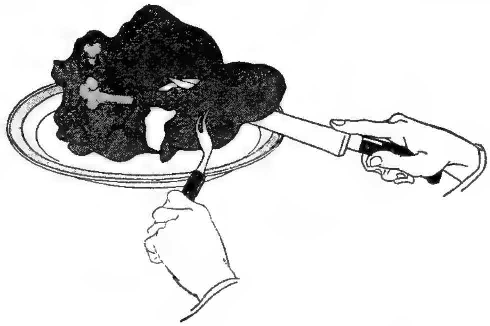
Antique and Modern Arms

Arrows	**$1.00** up	War medals	**$ 3.00** up
Zulu shields	**$8.50** "	Flint pistols	**$ 4.50** "
African spears	**$5.00** "	Blunderbusses	**$15.00** "
Dirks	**$5.00** "	Arrowheads, set	**$ 1.00** "

Illustrated reference catalog, 372 pages, issue 1922, mailed 50 cents. New Circular for 2 ct. stamp.

Established 1865

Francis Bannerman Sons, 501 Broadway, New York



What sort of figure do you cut when you carve?

WHEN a crisp brown turkey or leg of lamb is placed in front of you and you sharpen the edge of your carving-knife—do you know the exact spot at which you should start to cut? Do you know where to insert the fork before you carve? Charles Faissole, maître d'hôtel of the Ambassador Hotel, New York, tells you how to carve poultry, roasts, fish, steak, legs and even roast pig in The New Butterick Cook Book.

Every Bachelor Knows

Uninteresting, monotonous meals served by an indifferent cook. He need no longer suffer thus. The New Butterick Cook Book contains a great variety of planned menus and delicious recipes for breakfast, dinner, supper and all special occasions — recipes that are simply explained and easy to follow. Forty different potato recipes; 50 recipes for eggs; 60 kinds of salads—this is a sample of what you find in

The New BUTTERICK COOK BOOK

Simple as a primer—complete as an encyclopedia

Trade Distributors — Dodd, Mead & Company, N. Y.

On sale at all bookstores and Butterick Pattern counters or sent direct

Clip This Coupon Now! Mail To-day!

Dept. N

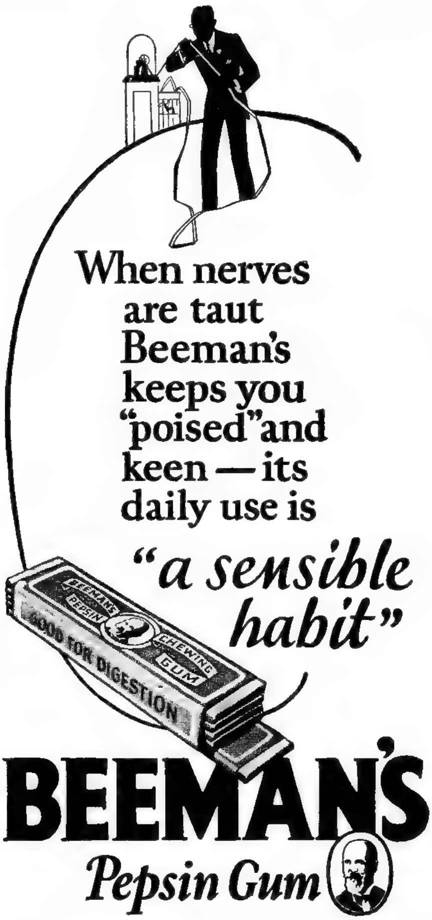
BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY
Butterick Building, New York

Please send me a copy of The New Butterick Cook Book for which I will pay the postman $2.65 ($2.50 for the book—15c for the postage)—$2.75 in Canada—when it is delivered to me. My understanding is that I may return this book after 5 days and have my money refunded if I am not fully satisfied.

Name..

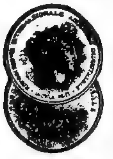
Street and No.................................

City.............................. *State*..............


When nerves are taut Beeman's keeps you "poised" and keen—its daily use is
"a sensible habit"
BEEMAN'S PEPSIN CHEWING GUM
GOOD FOR DIGESTION
BEEMAN'S
Pepsin Gum

AMERICAN CHICLE CO.

Stop Using a Truss



Reduced Fac-Simile Gold Medal

Reduced Fac-Simile Grand Prix

STUART'S PLAPAO-PADS are different from the truss, being mechanico-chemico applicators made **self-adhesive** purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. **No straps, buckles or spring attached**—cannot slip, so **cannot** chafe or press against the pubic bone. Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered. **Soft as velvet—easy to apply—inexpensive.** Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Process of recovery is natural, so afterwards no further use for trusses. We prove it by sending Trial of Plapao absolutely **FREE**. Write name on Coupon and send **TODAY.**

Plapao Co., 633 Stuart Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Name ....

Address ....

Return mail will bring Free Trial Plapao.

AGENTS, BIG MONEY and FAST SALES

Every owner buys gold initials for his auto. You charge $1.50 make $1.44. 10 orders daily easy. Samples and information free.
WORLD MONOGRAM CO., Dept. 104, Newark, N. J.

"Good-bye, Boys!"

"Today I dropped in for a last word with the boys at the office. And as I saw Tom and Dave there at the same old desk it came to me suddenly that they had been there just so the day I came with the firm four years ago.

"When I started here I was put at a desk and given certain routine things to do. But after a few months I began to realize that I was nothing but a human machine—doing things that any one could do.

"So I wrote to Scranton and arranged for a spare-time study course that would give me special training for our work. Why, do you know, it gave me a whole new interest in our business? In a few months I was given more responsibility and more money. Since then I've had three increases. Six months ago I was put in charge of my department, and now my big chance has come—I'm to be manager of our Western branch at $5,000 a year! It just shows what spare-time training will do."

If *you* want to make more money, show your employer you are trying to be *worth* more money. If you want a bigger job, show him you are willing to *prepare* for it.

There's a simple, easy way to do it. For 32 years the International Correspondence Schools have been training men and women right in their own homes whenever they had a little time to spare. More than 180,000 are studying now. Ten thousand are starting every month.

Can you afford to let another priceless hour pass without finding out what the I. C. S. can do for you? Here is all we ask—without cost, without obligating yourself in any way, mark and mail this coupon.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2038-D, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an **X**:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Personnel Organization
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Business Law
- ☐ Banking and Banking Law
- ☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)
- ☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ Spanish ☐ French
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Better Letters
- ☐ Show Card Lettering
- ☐ Stenography and Typing
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ High School Subjects
- ☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineer
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ Civil Engineer
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Metallurgy
- ☐ Steam Engineering
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Architect
- ☐ Blue Print Reading
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Automobile Work
- ☐ Airplane Engines
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Agriculture and Poultry
- ☐ Mathematics

Name..

Street Address.. 11-21-23

City.......................................State..

Occupation...

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

She Found A Pleasant Way To Reduce Her Fat

She did not have to go to the trouble of diet or exercise. She found a better way, which aids the digestive organs to turn food into muscle, bone and sinew instead of fat.

She used *Marmola Prescription Tablets* which are made from the famous Marmola prescription. They aid the digestive system to obtain the full nutriment of food. They will allow you to eat many kinds of food without the necessity of dieting or exercising.

Thousands have found that the *Marmola Prescription Tablets* give complete relief from obesity. And when the accumulation of fat is checked, reduction to normal, healthy weight soon follows.

All good drug stores the world over sell *Marmola Prescription Tablets* at one dollar a box. Ask your druggist for them, or order direct and they will be sent in plain wrapper, postpaid.

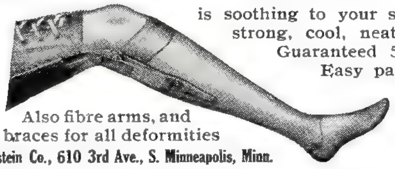
MARMOLA COMPANY
283 Garfield Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

MAKE MONEY AT HOME

YOU CAN make $1 to $2 an hour writing show cards at home in your spare time. Quickly and easily learned by our new simple method. No canvassing or soliciting. We show you how, guarantee you work at home no matter where you live and pay you cash each week. Full particulars and booklet free. Write to-day.

AMERICAN SHOW CARD SYSTEM LIMITED
Authorized and Fully Paid Capital, One Million Dollars
108 Adams Bldg. Toronto, Canada

BUCHSTEIN'S FIBRE LIMB

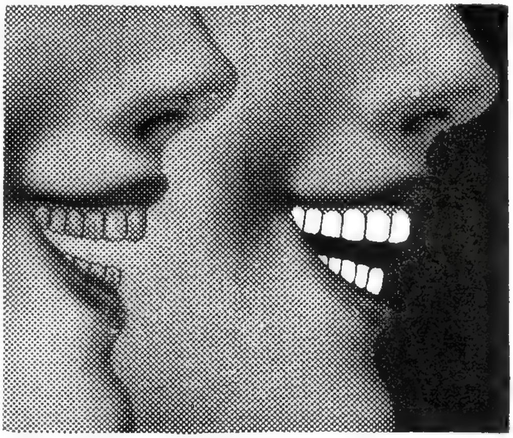


is soothing to your stump,—strong, cool, neat, light. Guaranteed 5 years. Easy payments.

Also fibre arms, and braces for all deformities

Send for Catalog Today

A. Buchstein Co., 610 3rd Ave., S. Minneapolis, Minn.



Tobacco Stained Teeth Instantly Whitened New Safe Way

No need now for yellow, discolored, spotted tobacco-stained teeth. Bleachodent Combination costs just a few cents and removes unsightly stains in three minutes at home. Leaves teeth white, lustrous, clean and flashing. Recommended everywhere as quicker, surer, safer than old-fashioned scouring methods which injured the enamel. Bleachodent Combination contains a marvelous mild liquid to loosen stain coats and a special paste which not only removes them, but used daily prevents formation of new stains. Only a safe mild preparation like Bleachodent Combination should be used on soft, sensitive teeth which stain and decay easily. Acts only on stains—not on enamel. Be sure to ask for Bleachodent Combination by its full name. Distributed by Bleachodent Dental Laboratories and sold by drug and department stores everywhere.

Prices Reduced On All Standard Make TYPEWRITERS

Lowest Prices in Years We will ship any make you choose for one week's trial. Underwood, Royal, L. C. Smith, Remington, Oliver, etc.

Easy Terms · Pay less than rent each month and own a typewriter. Guaranteed as good as new. Perfectly rebuilt by experts—the famous "Young Process." Send for our free trial offer and new low price list now. WRITE TODAY.

YOUNG TYPEWRITER CO.
World's Largest Dealers in Standard Typewriters
654 W. Randolph St., Dept. 1036, Chicago, Illinois

Try This on Your Hair 15 Days

Then let your mirror prove results. Write Today for FREE Trial Offer. Your hair need not thin out, nor need you become bald, for there is a way to destroy the microbe that destroys the hair. This different method will stop thinning out of the hair, lifeless hair, remove dandruff, itch, darken gray hair and threatened or increasing baldness, by strengthening and prolonging life of the hair for men and women. Send your name now before it is too late for the 15 days' free trial offer.

AYMES CO., 3932 N. Robey St., M-411, Chicago

!

fear

Are you self-conscious about the impression you make on people?

FEAR is probably the greatest handicap anyone can have in life. It keeps you from being your own real self—from doing your downright best and from getting on in life as you should.

Personal appearance has a lot to do with the way you feel. Clothes count, of course. But still there is one thing so many people overlook—something that at once brands them as either fastidious or careless—*the teeth.*

Notice today how you, yourself, watch another person's teeth when he or she is talking. If the teeth are not well kept they at once become a liability.

Listerine Tooth Paste cleans teeth a new way. At last our chemists have discovered a polishing ingredient that really cleans without scratching the enamel—a difficult problem finally solved.

You will notice the improvement even in the first few days. And you *know it is cleaning safely.*

So the makers of Listerine, the safe antiseptic, have found for you also the really safe dentifrice.

What are your teeth saying about you today?—*LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO., Saint Louis, U. S. A.*

LISTERINE TOOTH PASTE

Large Tube—25 cents

The Test of Donald Norton

by Robert E. Pinkerton

Romance and high adventure—flaming love and daring courage—unswerving fidelity to a great tradition—zealous devotion to a glorious ideal—the clash of primitive passions—all pictured by a master story-teller who uses the snow-swept barrens for his stage. Here is a book that marks high tide in fiction of the great North Woods.

The Test of Donald Norton is a vivid, strong, masterful story—a story that you will long remember.

AT ALL BOOKSTORES—$2.00

Publishers—REILLY & LEE—Chicago

$75.00 CASH WEEKLY *also* Guaranteed Salary

Steady income; pleasant, easy, demonstrating Violet Rays and Electrical devices. Experience not required; the demonstration makes many buy on sight; marvelous, scientific devices bring health and beauty. Endorsed by doctors and plain folks. MEN and WOMEN earn big money, spare or all time. Salary to producers. Commissions liberal, in advance. We deliver and collect. A push-over, quick money. Write for exclusive territory.

VI-REX CO. 211 S. PEORIA ST. Dept. A-56 **Chicago**

Lack of Training Cost This Man $47,424!

For forty years Sherman C. Wood, of Baltimore, Md., had been averaging less than $24 a week, with the exception of two years when he was acting as foreman of a department.

Forty years is a long time to wait—but he saw, thru the failings of others, what would happen to him unless he found a way to train for larger responsibilities.

Wood took up home-study training under the LaSalle Problem Method, and within a period of ten months—and by "devoting only about four or five hours a week" to his studies—he was promoted from foreman to the position of factory superintendent, *and his salary was practically doubled.*

He writes: "I can truthfully say to younger men that if they would only profit by the experience of others they can gain more knowledge thru one year's training by LaSalle methods than can be obtained in ten years' practical experience on the job by hard work."

Mail the Coupon—Save the Money!

Better late than never—but—do you realize what that delay cost Sherman C. Wood and those who were near and dear to him?

For one thousand, nine hundred and seventy-six weeks he paid *at least $24 a week for the doubtful privilege of staying in the ranks of untrained men.* His neglect of this one main avenue of business progress cost him—leaving simple and compound interest out of the reckoning—the appalling sum of $47,424—a fortune in itself!

* * * *

How much are YOU paying for your membership in the Regretful Order of the Untrained?

Below this text there's a coupon. It will bring you just the information you should have—it will place before you opportunities that for thousands and thousands of men have spelt SUCCESS.

Fill it in, clip it, and place it in the mail today.

LaSalle Extension University

The Largest Business Training Institution in the World

Dept. 6367-R **Chicago, Illinois**

Please send me catalog and full information regarding the course and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of your book, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation to me.

- ☐ **Business Management**
- ☐ **Modern Salesmanship**
- ☐ **Traffic Management**
- ☐ **Higher Accountancy**
- ☐ **Railway Station Management**
- ☐ **Law, Degree of LL.B.**
- ☐ **Commercial Law**
- ☐ **Industrial Management Efficiency**
- ☐ **Banking and Finance**
- ☐ **Modern Business Correspondence and Practice**
- ☐ **Modern Foremanship and Production Methods**
- ☐ **Personnel and Employment Management**
- ☐ **Expert Bookkeeping**
- ☐ **Business English**
- ☐ **Commercial Spanish**
- ☐ **Effective Speaking**
- ☐ **C. P. A. Coaching**

Name..

Present Position..

Address..

Baby's Skin must be Soft and Yielding

HE is always reaching, striving, stretching,—a veritable little gymnast—intently determined on the baby task of growing up.

By this characteristic activity he is stretching constantly that delicate skin of his to take care of the growth of his body, and you must help him all you can. Keep his skin soft, clean and healthy, that the active little body may exercise in perfect comfort.

In his authoritative book on the "Baby's First Two Years," after advising a pure, white soap, Dr. Richard M. Smith of Boston says: "A normal, healthy baby should be bathed daily; the body thoroughly soaped and dipped into the warm water."

For almost a half century doctors have specifically recommended Ivory Soap as *pure, white and* safely mild for baby's daily bath. Ivory may be used freely for every intimate baby purpose.

Only a soap as mild and gentle as Ivory should be used also for the constant laundering of delicate babywear. "Little woolens," says the same authority, "should be washed by soft squeezing with the hands in *warm water and Ivory soapsuds*, then rinsed in several waters of the same temperature. Cotton garments should be washed on a washboard with *Ivory soapsuds and hot water.*"

Ivory is a really safe soap both for baby and for his clothes.

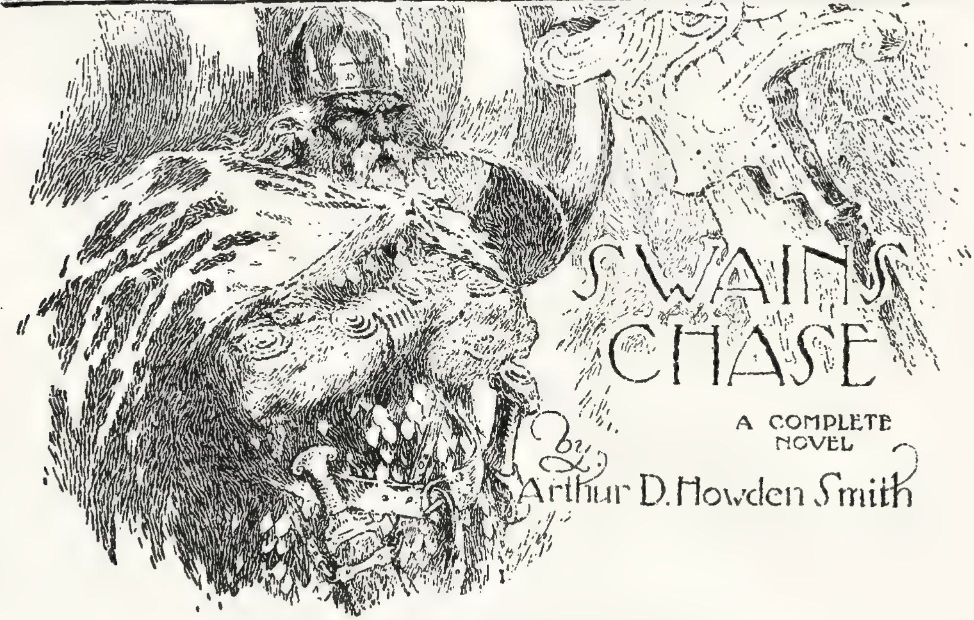
PROCTER & GAMBLE

IVORY
SOAP

99⁴⁴⁄100% PURE IT FLOATS

© 1924, by The Procter & Gamble Co., Cincinnati

Adventure
Registered in U. S. Patent Office
June 20 1924
Vol XLVII
No 2



SWAIN'S CHASE

A COMPLETE NOVEL

By Arthur D. Howden Smith

Author of "Swain's Honor," "Swain's Justice," etc.

CHAPTER I

OF SWAIN'S COMING TO BJORGVIN, AND OF THE SKALDCRAFT OF ODDI THE LITTLE AND ARMOD THE SKALS

SWAIN OLAF'S son stood on the poop of his dragon *Deathbringer*, coming the steersmen through the crowded roadstead of Bjorgvin.* Behind him crawled his two other long ships, *Seabroth* and *Seascraper*. The oarsmen in the waist were pulling with short, quick strokes, backing now to starboard, now to larboard, in obedience to Swain's sharp commands. The great, square mainsail lay furled against the mast.

Forward on the forecastle a group of men stood by the anchor-stone, ready to heave it overside at the word from the poop. With them, keeping a vigilant outlook on his own account, was a short, bow-legged man with a face like a piece of tanned leather out of which twinkled two eyes that were at once wise and humorous. He was Swain's forecastle man, Erik Skallagrim's son. He came from Iceland, and was known through the North for his wit in council and his trick of terse sayings. Men called him "Crooked Legs." It was his voice that growled above the rattle of the oar-helves and the hoarse, "hah-ho! ho-hah!" of the rowers.

"Ho, Swain," he shouted aft along the runway betwixt the rowing-benches, "look to that golden dragon ahead by the strand. King Ingi must be here."

Swain's eyes followed Erik's pointing finger, and he nodded curtly.

"Only a king or a fool would dress a fighting-ship like a bower-maiden," he answered. "Back, larboard oars! Steady,

---

* Bergen.

Copyright, 1924, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain. All rights reserved.

port! Ahead, ahead! Hold! Cast the stone, Erik."

Two men poised the big stone on the gunwale, two others aided them to swing it clear and with a splash it struck the water's surface and the huge dragon brought up abruptly on the taut mooring-rope. Oars were drawn in and piled athwart the benches, and the rowers stood to stretch their cramped muscles and stare curiously at the houses of the town and the glut of shipping surrounding them; lean viking rovers like themselves, high-sided Iceland merchantmen and Greenland-farers, bluff busses* from the Eastland ports, English wool-traders and ore-carriers, round-bellied Frankish transports, and more long-ships than the eye could count. But standing out from all the other craft was the gilded dragon to which Erik had called attention.

Its furled sail evidently carried a picture or device of some character and was splotched with purple, yellow and red. The carven prow was enlivened by the gilded scales of the monster it represented, and a darting red tongue and immense green eyes. The hull was scarlet, with green bands around the oar-holes and the rows of shields hung overside were all painted with double-headed eagles. The stern towered in a curling, golden tail which seemed about to flick sidewise at the nearest vessels and knock them out of the water. There was a glitter of polished steel from end to end, and more than an occasional hint of silver helms.

Swain scowled at it.

"If that is how King Ingi spends his revenues I do not wonder that Norway is poor," he said. "Put over the small boat, Erik. I go ashore with you. The rest will stay by the ship."

Sea-weary as was every man of the crew after a hard voyage across the open sea, none thought of raising an objection to this ruling. All knew well what would be the fate of him who ventured to oppose his will to Swain's.

Swain, himself, crossed to the larboard side of the poop, and hailed *Seabroth* and *Seascraper*.

"Ho, Thorar, Leif!" he called.

A man leaped to the nearest gunwale of each. Thorar Asgrim's son braced one foot on the shoulder of a man below him on the poop of *Seabroth*. He was gray like a bush on which the hoar-frost clings, but his voice rang vibrant across the watery gap. Leif Anakol's son, sturdy, scarce middle-aged, responded from the waist of *Seascraper*.

"Keep your men ship-bound," ordered Swain. "I want no drunkenness or disorder in my company. Erik and I will go ashore and learn what we can. Do you await us—and be silent with strangers."

Both captains assented, and Swain dropped from the gunwale of *Deathbringer* into the small-boat which Erik had brought beneath him. The Icelander took the oars and pulled landward. They passed under the stern of the gilded dragon, and Swain eyed contemptuously the richness of her fittings and the gaudy mail of the men who leaned upon her high bulwarks.

"King Ingi must have taken rich spoil this season," remarked Erik, breathing easily at his task. "There is a Jarl's ransom in that craft."

There is foolishness," snorted Swain. "What is gold on a ship or silver on a helm? These harnesses of ours, rusty and salt-white, will turn a blow as surely—yes, and surer."

AT THE strand they were puzzled to find few people in evidence, for the quantity of shipping in the port indicated that there must be many sailors and viking-farers ashore. And as they crossed the beach and entered the straggling streets of the town they were further amazed to perceive that the citizens, too, had disappeared.

"Humph!" said Swain. "Here is a fight or a pest. We had best be cautious, Erik. Let us try Unna's Inn. There are always men of note stopping with her."

Unna's Inn was a large, thatch-roofed building over against St. Olaf's Church. It was much like any nobleman's skalli, with a central hall and a limited number of bedchambers opening off it and pallets for the lesser sort up under the thatch. Behind it ranged barns, storehouses and hovels for thralls and serving-folk.

The hall was dimly lighted, and all Swain and Erik could see at first after they entered were vague rows of tables and waving folds of arras on the walls.

"It is empty," said Erik.

"No, no, there are two men," interrupted Swain, motioning to one side of the hall, where, in a corner, a pair of figures crouched over a table, heedless of the newcomers.

---

*Heavy cargo vessels.

Indeed, as Swain and Erik approached nearer they perceived that the two at the table were immersed in an argument which had diverted them from the ale-horns in front of them.

"That for your jingle-jangle verses!" cried the smaller of the couple, rapping sword-hilt on the table's edge. "All the sense of your lay sacrificed to find the last word to tag a line with! I tell you Geirason has said——"

"And I tell you," thrust in the taller, waving an elegant hand by way of emphasis, "that only a skald who confesses himself lacking in wit and skill with words can complain that he must sacrifice point to rhyming. Why, the Latins and Franks, as you no doubt——"

Swain bent his grim face to a level with the two disputants.

"I am a stranger here," he said, "and by your leave——"

The little man waved him excitedly aside.

"One moment, whoever you are!" he snapped. "Have you not sufficient courtesy to see that my friend and I are in the midst of considering a subject of import?"

And he continued:

"As for your Latins and Franks, Armod, I care not a straw whether they rhyme line with line or verse with verse. What have we to do with them?"

A slow grin split the mass of Swain's ruddy beard; Erik, behind him, chuckled openly.

"The discourtesy is not all upon the one side," said Swain; "but it pleases me that you——"

"You do not know what you are talking about!" rebuked the tall man at the table, without even looking at Swain. "This is a debate between skalds. Or I should say between a skald and one who is reckoned a skald, for, Oddi, loath though I am to assail you, your narrowness of view must always stand in the way of your achieving that measure of glory to which your ingenuity and agility of expression entitle you."

Swain and Erik regarded each other in questioning amazement.

"It may be these people are mad," said Erik softly, "and Unna has gone away with her company, lest they do harm."

Swain frowned impatiently.

"I am——"

"Oh, you are who you are, friend!" protested the little man. "None disputes that."

"A moment's peace, if you please," besought the big man, "and then we shall be at your service. Oddi, you are as true a comrade and brave as can be found in the North, but in the field of rhyming you are as limited as all your sort, and I should err in comradeship did I not say ——"

The little man bounded from his seat.

"Are there any sane folk in this madhouse?" bellowed Swain.

"I know of two," rapped the little man. "But I had best say one, for you, Armod, have permitted vanity to freeze your wits. I will concede you the ability to make tinkling jingles, but you are unable to conceive warriors' verses or improvise as I—" and his chest swelled out— "have frequently done before the great men in every court in the North."

Armod sat erect, and Swain perceived now the full, lean height of the man.

"Now does your vanity overrun your discretion!" exclaimed the tall skald.

"Vanity!" snorted Oddi. "You to prate of vanity!"

"Nevertheless, I shall reveal to these strangers how vanity has induced you to belittle me needlessly," persisted Armod. "I will give you a challenge, Oddi. You speak of the greater powers of the untagged line. Very well! I take you at your word."

He glanced about the room, and finally pointed to a breadth of tapestry on the wall which showed the stooping figure of an old man with a weapon over his shoulder and a hostile look upon his face.

"There!" he said. "I will recite a stanza on that tapestry—in your rhymeless fashion, with naught but the beat of the words to trip it on the tongue. When I have finished, do you speak a stanza, and with no word in it that I have used."

Oddi sat himself jauntily upon the edge of the table.

"It is a fair challenge," he admitted. "I accept it."

"So be it," agreed Armod. "Strangers!"

He included Swain and Erik in the wave of his hand.

"You shall judge between us, for I can see that you are Northern-born, and every Northern-born man has in him some skaldic sense."

He took a drink from his ale-horn, fixed his eyes upon the tapestry for an instant and then recited:

The old one on the hangings standing,
Has a sheath-rod on his shoulder,
But, in spite of all his anger,
He will not get one step further.

The words were scarce out of his mouth when the little man inflated his chest, blew out his cheeks and chanted:

For a stroke himself prepares the
Warrior in stooping posture,
Where the tapestry is parted;
Yet his danger will be greatest.
Time it is for ships' commanders
Peace to make ere harm does happen.

He wheeled upon Swain.

"How of that, judges?" he demanded.

Swain smiled, a tight, grim smile that no man who had ever seen it forgot—for if it expressed amusement nonetheless did it reveal a certain wasting contempt.

"It is words," he said, "and I am no judge of words."

"Of swords, perhaps?" inquired the tall skald gently.

"Why, yes, of swords," assented Swain.

"We carry swords, for the matter of that," exploded the little man, "and we have used them; but what we are talking about is not swords, but verses. The question is: Did I not comply with the terms of my friend's challenge?"

Erik hastened to smooth over a situation which gave promise of becoming tense.

"Inasmuch as I am Iceland-born and have traveled widely in many lands, you will grant me some knowledge of skald's craft," he intervened. "My opinion is that you have both succeeded in the tasks you set yourselves. The better-rounded of the two verses was the first, but that was to be expected, as the second verse must be modeled differently from the first. Moreover, the second verse was unusually adroit in its word-play. I should call what you have done a notable feat."

The little man skipped forward, with a comical quirk to his face, and regarded the Icelander more closely.

"Well-judged!" he pronounced. "Have I ever met you before? My name is Oddi Glum's son, and men call me the 'Little.'"

"Your face would never have slipped my memory had we met, Oddi," Erik assured him gravely.

"Ah! And how are you called? You have the look of one who has consorted with noted warriors."

"I am Erik Skallagrim's son, and I dwell in the Orkneys."

"With Swain Olaf's son," put in the taller of the two skalds. "I have heard of you twain. Perhaps you know my lay of the fight you made against the Two Jarls at Skalpeid? It is very well——"

Swain crashed a knotted fist upon the table-top.

"And are you, who make lays on my deeds, to keep me waiting for an answer to a question?" he roared.

The little skald's eyes popped from his head. The tall one revealed a moderately languid interest.

"Who are you?" he asked coolly.

"I am Swain."

"I should have known it," cried the little man. "That ruddy beard—and the way he has of stabbing with his eyes. I must make note of that."

Swain's hand went to his sword.

"I am not accustomed to being kept waiting," he said icily.

The tall skald lifted a protesting hand, almost as if the effort must break his arm.

"You should have told us," he rebuked gently. "How were we to know you for any but some ordinary boendr or lenderman come to Bjorgvin to view the king and other famous men?"

"Such as yourselves!" scowled Swain.

"Such as ourselves," agreed the tall skald. "You shall wander to many lands and hear lays until your dying day before you encounter two skalds more famous than Oddi and I."

"Who are you?" sneered Swain.

"I am Armod, and men call me the 'Skald.'"

Swain was impressed, despite himself. Not for nothing, he knew, was a man dubbed in this fashion.

"Well, well," he answered gruffly. "Famous or not, it is all by the way. What I am still seeking of you is an answer to my question."

"Which you have not yet asked," Oddi reminded him.

"For the reason that no ordinary man could wag his tongue over his lips hitherto," retorted Swain. "Briefly, what I desire to know is the reason why Bjorgvin is deserted?"

"It is not deserted," replied the little man promptly.

"The folk are all gone up to the king's

hall to gap at Eindridi Ungi* and his people who are fresh come from Mikligard,"† added Armod.

"Eindridi Ungi," repeated Swain. "Is it he who commands the Varang Guards of the Greek emperor?"

"The same. Did you not see his dragon in the haven?"

"Ho-ho," laughed Swain. "So it was his ship that was dressed up like a church or a Queen's bower! I did King Ingi wrong."

"That did you if you laid Eindridi's *Seamaiden* to his account," said Oddi.

"No, no," interposed Armod. "I see no reason for criticizing Eindridi because he adorns his craft to show his relish in her. A man's ship is his best friend, as Ragnar Lodbrok was wont to say. And moreover, a great warrior who can enjoy the beautiful is highly to be esteemed."

"I can find more use for a great warrior who seeks his pleasure where the ravens flock," rejoined Swain. "But each man to his taste. Do I understand you to say that all the folk in the town have gone to the king's hall?"

"All who were free and had the use of their limbs," answered Oddi promptly, for Armod evinced a certain resentment of Swain's last observation. "The famous men and those of note and wealth have gone in to hear the tales Eindridi will recount to the king, and the lesser men are lingering about the door to talk with Eindridi's house-carls and see the rich gifts he fetched the king from the Emperor Manuel."

"And you and Armod, not choosing to bide by the door, remained here to debate words," commented Swain.

Oddi's brow tightened, but it was his companion who spoke first. Armod drew his sword with a singular, deadly reluctance, as if the effort was drawn from him against his will.

"I see clearly," he remarked in his drawling, low-pitched voice, "that men have not maligned you, Swain, when they termed you quarrelsome, and rough of tongue. And albeit I am a poor skald, with threadbare raiment, as you may see, I keep my sword bright and my honor clean—nor do I yield myself to any warrior's insults, whatever his prowess and however great his name."

Oddi's sword flashed out, and the little man darted to Armod's side.

"There are more than words in what Armod has said," he declared. "We are two, and you are two, and here is sufficient space for us to stamp in. Let us see if you can live up to your reputation, Swain."

Swain glanced from one to the other, and no man might read his feelings in the grim impassivity of his features. Of all the warriors then living in the northern countries he was accounted greatest, and though he was a mere bondi of the Orkneys, he was ranked by many skalds above Jarls and men of title. He had won much wealth by viking voyages and success in civil struggles. Men said of him that he was staunch to his friends and liberal to his followers, but ferocious and tireless in hatred of his enemies. In his person he was tall and strong, yet not so tall as the tallest; his strength lay, rather, in the mighty network of muscles which clothed his limbs and the keen wit which foresaw an opponent's attack.

Erik knew him as well as any man, but the Icelander could never tell how he would act.

"This is a poor business, Swain," said Erik now. "What fame can we two win by slaying a pair of skalds?"

"The skalds are still to be slain," threatened Oddi. "We have sword-skill as well as skaldcraft."

Swain nodded his head.

"I believe that to be so," he replied. "Also, I will admit that I have done you an injustice.

His cold blue eyes sparked at them.

"You will not question me when I say that I can afford to withdraw my words in any man's face."

"It is of no concern to me whether you withdraw them or not, Swain," answered Armod, sinking back into his seat; "but I confess to satisfaction at not relinquishing this ale. Unna's last brewing was excellent."

"Ale is less important than honor," cried Oddi, flourishing his sword. "And you are welcome to withdraw your words or fight, as you choose——"

"I choose to withdraw them" said Swain quietly.

"Very well, very well," returned Oddi. "Perhaps I should be glad of it. The truth is, Swain, Armod and I were on the point of setting forth with Erling Kyrpinga's son and other lendermen and chiefs for the king's hall when Armod started this ridiculous argument as to the merit of the tagged line, in which, you must understand—for I take it you are no expert skald by your lack of interest in a point of great nicety—the end words of the several lines must rhyme."

---

* The Younger. † Constantinople.

"We had talked of Eindridi's prosperity," put in Armod languidly, "and I quoted, as apt to the point, Einar Jingle-scale's verse in the Vellekla, in which he speaks of Jarl Hakon Sigurd's son:

> The Jarl that on his noble brow
> A silken fillet binds,
> Counties seven hath he enthralled
> With chattels, lands and hinds.

"And I maintain——"

"Armod," said Swain, "I am no skald, as you have guessed, and I write my lays with the sword in human flesh for all men to discuss as they please. Therefore take it not amiss if I tell you that I find small interest in the subject of your discussion."

Armod fingered his sword-hilt again.

"If, perchance, you felt any inclination to composing such a sword-lay," he suggested, "I should gladly aid you."

"I do not," replied Swain. "You may put it that I prefer neither to slay nor be slain, for I am anxious to hear what Eindridi Ungi has to report from Mikligard. There is one I seek who is nowhere in these parts, and it may be that he has journeyed thither to escape my wrath."

"That would be Olvir Rosta, whose grandmother was Frakork the Witch," remarked Oddi tentatively. "I have heard of your feud with him, Swain. Did any skald ever recite to you my verses on the occasion of your burning of Frakork?"

Swain's face was a thunder-cloud.

"No," he answered abruptly. "I care not to listen to lays on that matter. Frakork and Olvir were the means of the death of my father and mother, and my two brothers. Frakork have I slain, but Olvir has yet to feel the weight of my vengeance. But my time shall come, yes, though it requires the whole of my life, and I must pursue him to Mikligard or Serkland* or over the world's rim!"

Oddi sprang toward him with hand outstretched.

"Now there is a fit subject for a lay," he exclaimed. "Not Grettir, himself, offered a finer chance. Have you room for another sword-swinger in your household, Swain?"

Swain frowned down into the little man's eager face, all wrinkled and weathered like a russet groundling, with its luminous, twinkling eyes.

"For a *man*, yes," he said.

Armod stifled a yawn and rose.

"My appetite is smaller than my thirst, Swain," he observed, "and I am not backward when steel is wielded. Perhaps you have room for two *men?*"

"Why, there is a chance that I have," replied Swain. "But let us first hear what Eindridi has to tell."

"I am with you in that," drawled Armod. "That is, if Oddi consents to postpone our argument."

Oddi waved an airy gesture of assent.

"Gladly," he said, "and all the more readily for that there can be no valid question at stake. As Thord Kolbein's son has said——"

"Ah, but you have no thought for the Frankish skalds," protested Armod. "The lays of the worshipful King Arthur and his warriors, and those Wendland folk who—"

Swain plucked an arm of each.

"Rhyme or no rhyme, we go to hear Eindridi Ungri, who, I doubt not, for all his frippery, has lived more lays than you twain have written. I see clearly that I shall never be able to argue with either of you, whatever else I may perform."

Oddi chuckled with Erik. Armod carefully adjusted a faded bow of blue ribbon at the throat of his tattered surcoat, beneath which the links of his mail-shirt showed bright as silver.

"I know not what there is about you which persuades me to your service, Swain," he said, "for I believe you give your men hard knocks and sea fare as well as ample booty, and a rough tongue is the sign of a hard master, the saying warns. But I fancy you before a man like Eindridi, who may be sufficiently potent as a warrior, but is laughable as a skald. Let us go."

And this time Swain chuckled.

"Since we are in agreement, let us go," he answered. "It is in my mind, Erik, that we have won to us a pair of lusty trouble-stirrers."

"Trouble-stirrers who will be stout foe-quenchers," added Oddi.

"Of trouble there is never an end," commented Erik. "But all famous men require skalds to recount their deeds, and it is fitting that you should attend Swain."

"*Hrr-rrumph!*" growled Swain. "They

---

*Norse name for all Saracen countries in North Africa and Asia Minor.

may fight for me if I bid them, but let them beware of mouthing their verses at me."

CHAPTER II

OF EINDRIDI UNGI AND HIS TALES OF MIKLIGARD, AND OF SWAIN'S MEETING WITH ERLING, WHO WAS AFTERWARD NAMED WRYNECKED

BEFORE the king's hall was an open space kept clear by his guards, big men with scarlet cloaks hanging from their shoulders and spears in their hands. And against the shoulders of the guards pressed the common folk of Bjorgvin and the sailors from the ships in the haven, peering awe-struck at the wondrous gifts which Eindridi's house-carls had piled by the door.

Few men there had ever seen such wealth, and some of the things Eindridi had fetched from the emperor were unknown to the North. There was a chariot, to be drawn by two horses or four, with a canopy to cover the occupant and a seat in front for a driver. There were ewers and salvers and profusion of vessels of all kinds in gold and silver and silver-gilt. There were tapestries and cloths marvelously wrought, and rich store of holy pictures, and most marvelous of all, in a tiny receptacle of gold, studded with gems, a finger-knuckle of the blessed Saint Demetrius, which was a sure warranty against dizziness and the falling sickness. But the only things which caught the eye of Swain were the weapons and mail, and they aroused in him more disgust than envy because they were damascened and inlaid with enamels and precious metals.

He and his friends had no difficulty in getting through the crowd, for a number of sailors on the outskirts recognized him.

"Way for Swain Olaf's son! Give way there, Bjorgvinfolk! Here is Swain, the viking-farer."

And so Swain and those with him reached the line of the king's guards, and these, at a word from Armod, passed them into the cleared space. Armod would have tarried to examine the splendor strewn upon the benches by the door and even scattered about on the hard-packed earth, but Swain tightened his clasp upon the skald's arm.

ORKNEY ISL'D
NORTH SEA
BALTIC SEA
N
W
E
S
ATLANTIC OCEAN
BRITISH ISLES
RUSSIA
GERMANY
EUROPE
FRANCE
BLACK SEA
ITALY
ADRIATIC SEA
CONSTANTINOPLE
SPAIN

"Time enough to see these pretties later," he growled. "Now we have to find Eindridi."

The king's hall was a mighty building, many times larger than the largest skalli. The roof-beams were enormous tree-trunks, squared and trimmed, and the rafters overhead wove back and forth like a forest. Five hundred men might sit to meet at the tables which were ranged down the center, and on the walls hung trophies of arms and hides and heads of the bear, the auroch, the reindeer, the wolf and of strange beasts that the far-wanderers had fetched home for the king's amusement. Coiled around one beam was the skin of a sea-snake men said was as lengthy as the dragon-ship which King Olaf Tryggvi's son had built and christened *Long Serpent* and aboard which he had got his death-stroke.

At the opposite end from the door was the high table where King Ingi sat with his lendermen and chiefs about him, and the body of the hall was crammed with other warriors, ship captains and younger sons. And now for the first time a light of joy flickered in Swain's eyes, for he found more pleasure in the sight of these thick-thewed raven-feeders than in the luxuries of the Greek emperor heaped without. There was not a man there but could prove his forwardness in battle. Some faces still revealed the pinkness of youth, some were tanned a dusky red and creased with a myriad wrinkles; but every one was stamped with the fierce watchfulness which is the hall-mark of the warrior.

The king dominated the assembly by reason of the golden circlet about his brows, but there were many better men than he present in the hall. Ingi was an amiable man and sufficiently well liked, and also, staunch of heart, but he had the misfortune to be a cripple, and hump-backed in the bargain. And for this reason many men yielded greater respect to his brothers, King Sigurd and King Eystein, who shared the government of the country with him.

From the king, whom he knew of old, Swain turned his gaze to the man at his right hand. This man was very big in his frame, and bony in a hard, craggy way, and his face was excessively ugly, his mouth large, his nose hooked and broken, his ears prominent, his hair ragged and stiff. But withal, his eyes were straightforward and kindly, and there was about his person and the manner in which he carried himself a modesty which is not to be expected from those who sit at the right hand of kings.

"Who is that man?" said Swain.

And Oddi answered—

"He is Erling, son to Kyrpinga Orm, and he and his brother, Ogmund, are the principal of the king's counselors."

"He appears to me to be a man who would be both wise and valiant," said Swain.

"That is his reputation," replied Oddi.

"Such a man I would like for a friend," remarked Swain. "They are not numerous."

And it is to be remarked that this Erling, who was to become Swain's friend in truth, was he who afterward—in a manner which this tale shall relate—was dubbed Skakki, which is to say Wrynecked. And it was he who in years to come wedded Kristina, daughter to King Sigurd Jorsalafarer *, and slew King Hakon Herdabreid—The Broad-Shouldered—in the fight under Sekkr and placed on the throne his own son Magnus.

On the king's left sat a man who was different as possible from Erling. Handsome in face and lithely built, his long, yellow hair flowed over his shoulders. His mail-coat was silvered; the helm which hung on his chair-back was golden, with a feathered crest; on his silken red doublet was embroidered a two-headed eagle in black. In his features were expressed pride, valor, determination, vanity; all four in like measure.

"That is Eindridi," said Armod. "There is a chief for you, Swain. He is as brave as yourself, and yet he has an eye for beauty and can improvise verses—not such verses as a skilled verse-maker would father, to be sure, but still very fair for one who is professedly a warrior."

"Beware of riding two horses," commented Erik, behind them. "He who tries it falls beneath the hoofs."

"Are you fey, little man?" inquired Swain with rare jocularity over his shoulder.

"That is to be seen," returned Erik. "But I would rather be a man with a single gift like you or Erling than divide my talents."

And in after years Swain and others marveled at the Icelander's saying, for Eindridi came to espouse the cause of King Hakon Herdabreid and slew King Ingi—beside whom this day he sat—and afterward fought against Erling Skákki in the fight under Sekkr, as has been told, and was himself slain by Erling's men. But with these events this tale has no concern.

Eindridi was talking as Swain and his companions entered the king's hall.

"Nowhere in the world," he was saying, "shall you find a city like Mikligard or a country so powerful as that which the emperor rules over. Why, Lord King, there are as many folk within the walls of that city as there are in all Norway, and in the emperor's dominions are countless myriads more. And though I have traveled in all the Frankish lands, and with the emperor's armies have taken some of the fairest cities of the heathen in Serkland, never have I seen such wealth as these Greeks possess. Gold with them is more common than is silver with us."

"But if that is the case," spoke up Erling, "how does it happen that the emperor sends you to us for men to serve in his guards? Surely, among his own people he should find sufficient men for his purposes."

---

* Jerusalemfarer, *i. e.* Crusader.

Eindridi leaned forward on the table, so that he might see across the table in front of the king to where Erling sat.

"That is a just question," he said, "but your answer is to be found in this hall. Where on earth can better warriors be found than in our northern lands?"

A buzz of appreciation responded to his words, and he waved for silence.

"I would not have you understand me as claiming that these Greeks are a race of cowards," he went on. "That is far from the truth. As a people, they are slighter than we, and not so hardy in war; but they have a rare trick of fighting all together, in an established order, with companies of bowmen and spearmen and horsemen, mingled and aiding, the one the other, shifting position at need, and ever aiming so to overlap a foe as to come upon him in flank or rear."

"Could they break a shield-wall?" asked King Ingi.

"I could not say, Lord King, for I have never fought with them; but the heathen folk of Serkland are such fighters as none of us need be ashamed to face, and time out of mind I have seen the emperor and his chiefs holding their people in line against the assaults of multitudes of armored men, who look upon death as did our ancestors, who recked it no more than the boon of entrance to Valhalla. Yes, and I have seen the Greeks, themselves, fighting in the spear-wedge or in masses of horse, thrust through the heathen array. And better still, in the monent of defeat, I have watched them preserve their ranks, leaving the dead and wounded where they dropped, always closing the gaps, and retiring foot by foot, faces to their pursuers."

There was a faint echo of applause.

"I have heard that in their wars vast numbers of men are engaged," remarked the king.

"That is so, Lord King," replied Eindridi. "As I have said, there are many more people in those lands than we have in the North. Why, it would be a day's march for an armored man to circle the walls of Mikligard."

"And does the mound surround the city on every side?" cried a young lenderman.

Eindridi laughed.

"It may be that you will have difficulty in crediting what I tell you," he said. "There is no mound and palisade about Mikligard, but a triple wall of stone thicker than this hall, and outside it a moat so broad and deep that a long-ship might cruise in it."

Murmurs of incredulity arose.

"I tell you it is so," exclaimed Eindridi. "Yes, and more wonderful than that, there are within the city baths for the use of the citizens in which an eighteen-oared long-ship could float. And palaces and churches the like of which has never been seen since Romaborg* was destroyed, for it was the Romans who built Mikligard and filled it with the goodliest statues and buildings they could devise to take the place of the old city more years past than I can count in a day."

"It should be a fine place to loot," said Erling.

"Many have thought so," countered Eindridi; "but in a thousand years it has never been taken. The heathen have tried many times, and always they have had their trouble for their pains. These Greeks are even better men behind walls than in the open."

And he added, as an afterthought:

"And, also, there are us of the Varangians to be reckoned with. We have never been broken."

"That is good hearing for Norsemen," said King Ingi, "seeing that the Varangs are our own folk."

"Men of Norway, of Swedeland, of Daneland, of Bretland†, and of Gardariki‡," answered Eindridi. "We are the emperor's favorites. We, alone, dwell in the great palace, with him and his household, and when he marches to battle it is we who escort him. It is honorable work, and as you may imagine—" his vanity cropped out in a slightly insolent intonation—"passing well paid."

"And you require more men?" spoke up Erling.

"Only a few, and those to be picked most carefully. No, my journey north was to pay my respects to King Ingi, and deliver him the trifling gifts the Emperor Manuel bestowed upon him, as the Christ-blessed one was kind enough to say—" and again Eindridi's voice rang out with the brazen clangor of inflated pride—"to evince to our Lord King the satisfaction he took in the services of his faithful Varangs and me, their commander."

"Whom left you in command, Eindridi?" inquired Erling.

---

*Rome. †Britain. ‡Russia.

"A Viking rover, who joined us a scant year before I sailed from Mikligard," replied Eindridi. "He is a hard man, and one I would not like to have for enemy, but as able a warrior as I ever led. Two heathen he slew with one blow of his ax, as I myself saw."

He turned to the table at large.

"It may be some of you have knowledge of him. He is Orkneyborn, albeit outlawed. His name is Olvir Rosta."

There was an instant of silence. Then Swain's voice boomed from the hall's entrance.

"I know Olvir Rosta! Way, there, for Swain Olaf's son. The man who has seen Olvir Rosta must speak with me."

He forged forward through the press, heaving men right and left before him, with Erik and the two skalds at his back; but speedily a way was made for him, as men recognized who he was.

"It is Swain," men whispered or called to each other. "Yes, yes, Swain of the Orkneys—he who pursues Olvir. Theirs is a deadly feud."

King Ingi rose in his place and stared down at Swain.

"Do you come in peace?" he demanded.

"How else, Lord King?" replied Swain. "No man has told me that you have harmed me."

And there was a chuckle at this, and the men in the hall nudged each other with elbows and sword-hilts.

"Is it so Swain is accustomed to addressing kings?" Oddi whispered in Erik's ear.

The Icelander shrugged his shoulders.

"In the Orkneys they have a saying," he responded. " 'What is a Jarl to Swain?' Having belittled Jarls, it is likely he will have a trial at a king—or perhaps this emperor in Mikligard."

Oddi hugged himself under his torn cloak.

"Certainly this is a hero for a skald to attend," he murmured. "We shall not lack deeds for lays."

But the king was speaking again.

"Well I know the truculence of your tongue is not the surest key to your mood, Swain," he said. "But I can not have you upsetting my hall over your private feuds."

Swain, having gained standing-room immediately below the high table at the king's feet, nodded his head.

"It is not my fault that you have every sword-swinger in Bjorgvin cluttering your hall, Lord King," he remarked casually. "If I trod on any toes or offended any feelings he who was injured can rely upon a sure remedy."

And once more a wave of chuckles spread through the hall, so much so that out in front the common folk heard it, and the sailors said to one another—

"That is Swain Olaf's son talking to the king."

"Be still!" commanded the red-cloaked guards.

"It is Swain Olaf's son," insisted an old Iceland steersman. "Well I knew when I saw him go in he would be saying what he had in his mind."

King Ingi sank back into his seat behind the high table.

"You will do no fighting in Bjorgvin, Swain," he said grimly, "not if I have sufficient house carls to keep you quiet."

"Instead of putting it to the test, Lord King," rejoined Swain, "why do you not permit me to learn the information I seek, and so be rid of me?"

"No, no, you are welcome here," answered the king, laughing, himself, albeit unwillingly, "so long as you keep the peace. But I will not have you fighting with Eindridi or any other as a friend of Olvir's."

"Nor will I," said Swain. "And the best reason for that is that I know Olvir is no friend to Eindridi Ungi."

Eindridi cried out in protest.

"I know you not, Swain Olaf's son, save that I have listened to men acclaim your deeds," he said. "But how can you say that Olvir is no friend to me? We have shared the same shield in battle, and where he is, I put him."

"That I do not question," replied Swain. "But be sure of this, Eindridi Ungi—to Olvir Rosta you are no more than a means to an end, for you possess a place which he desires. Let him once secure command in your stead, and you will find it no easy task to pry him from it. As for sharing a shield with him, if there had been a question of your life or his, Olvir would have done all that he could to save his own."

"Who are you, who know him so well?" demanded Eindridi.

"I am the man who shall yet slay him," declared Swain. "He and his evil grandmother, Frakork the Witch, slew my father and my two brothers; and for that I burned Frakork in her skalli, but Olvir escaped me, and lived to slay my mother. But my day is coming. When I have him before my sword I will make raven's meat of him."

King Ingi wagged a sad head.

"You and Olvir have made raven's meat of more stout carls and men of family than any other pair since the old days," he said, "The Saints send that you do the balance of your fighting in other parts."

"That is to be seen," answered Swain, and he addressed Eindridi Ungi—

"I am one who would be friendly with you," he said, "and other men than I had best say if my friendship is worth having——"

A shout came from the body of the hall: "A sure friend, Swain!" "Take him, Eindridi!" "Swain is right!"

Eindridi tugged at a yellow lock which hung over his shoulder, brows knitted in thought.

"I am no man to cry: 'Wet board, dry board,' " he said. "And as between you and Olvir I have no part to play, but if you desire to voyage to Mikligard I will accept your company, and I will do all that I may to secure you a welcome from the emperor when we reach there. More I can not say, for I will not judge Olvir without cause."

Swain stared at the Varangian keenly out of cold blue eyes.

"You are no fool," he answered then. "But the day comes you will agree with all I have said. Well, I will accept your offer. I have three long-ships with me, and perhaps we can achieve some exploits of interest on our way eastward."

Eindridi's handsome face flushed with pleasure and he stretched out a sinewy hand.

"If you speak bluntly, you talk sense," he declared. "I can see that you are as eager for fame as I am."

But Swain shook his head, even as he gripped the offered hand.

"For fame I care nothing. You are welcome to all that comes our way. But fighting and plunder, they are different matters."

King Ingi filled his ale-horn and extended it to Swain.

"Drink, Swain," he bade him. "If you entered abruptly that is not a reason for us to treat you impolitely. I will have the varlets set you a place at the board."

"I will not drink," replied Swain. "I have no taste for ale, Lord King. And I must return to my duties. My men are sea-weary, and I have to see to their rest and the bouning* of my ships."

Men murmured at this, and King Ingi flushed.

"At the least," said the king, "I may be thankful that you are not staying long in our midst to scatter discord. A man who does not respect a king——"

"I respect all men who merit respect," interrupted Swain curtly. "It is generally known that I do not drink ale. Neither am I one to sit at table of an evening, for the idle talk of comparing men† or striving to out-eat my neighbors. I have three ships to look to and better than twelve score men to be ordered. I cry your leave to depart, Lord King."

"You have it," said the king ungraciously.

Swain bowed his head a bare fraction of an inch, and started to spin upon his heel, but another outstretched hand stayed him.

"Hold," exclaimed Erling Kyrkpinga's son from the other side of the high table. "Swain, you and I have never met, but——"

"I know you," answered Swain briefly. "You are Erling."

Erling flushed boyishly.

"It is high honor to be known to you," he said.

"No, no, I observe all men of account," replied Swain.

"That is kindly spoken," said Erling, "coming from you."

"I am kindly in thought and speech to all men of courage and modesty," said Swain.

"But how can you know that of me?" objected Erling, laughing.

"I have looked at your face," replied Swain.

"It seems that you are honored, indeed," remarked King Ingi with a sneer. "Swain accepts you as a friend, Erling."

"I do so gladly, Lord King," said Swain coolly. "That man is fortunate who numbers such as Erling Kyrkpinga's son amongst his friends."

"I do not require to be instructed by you, Swain," flared the king ill-temperedly, and Erik touched Swain's elbow in sign that he should be cautious.

Norway was a democratic land, and Swain, in a measure, a privileged character, but there were limits in all things.

Erling saved the situation.

---

* Equipping. † Discussing their deeds and relative prominence, always an invitation to fighting and disagreement.

"Lord King," he said, still smiling, "I have to ask a favor of you?"

"If you ask it, Erling, I must grant it," replied the King, who, as has been said, honored Erling only after his brother, Ogmund.

"Nevertheless, I hope that you will regret so rash a promise," said Erling, "for what I am seeking is your permission that I sail with Swain and Eindridi, and I should not like to think that you would willingly part with me."

"Willingly?" cried the king. "That will I not! I could not do without you, Erling."

"Yet have you agreed already to grant what I ask," Erling reminded him.

"I did not know——"

"No, no, Lord King, you have promised," insisted Erling. "It remains for Swain to consent."

"Swain!" fumed King Ingi. "Ever since Swain entered this hall he has stirred up trouble. He is a trouble-stirrer."

And the king's fiery glance swept the faces of Swain and those with him.

"How is this?" he cried suddenly. "Armod? And you, too, Oddi? What do you with Swain?"

Armod made the king a bow as low as it was graceful.

"He has even admitted us of his company, Lord King," he answered.

"First, Erling, then you two," groaned the king. "It is too much! Can not Jarl Rognvald keep you quiet in the Orkneys, Swain?"

"Why, no, Lord King," replied Swain.

And the hall rocked with laughter, for it was common report in the North that Swain was more powerful than any Jarl. If he did not fancy one, he set up another to take the first one's place.

"Bethink you, King Ingi," pleaded Erling, his ugly face almost handsome as he smiled, "it is long since I performed any deed of my hands or went viking-faring as becomes a man of mettle. I would not have it said that because my father left me wealthy I have not striven to perform proper deeds or dare the unknown. And I perceive that in Swain's voyage to Mikligard there will be opportunity for many honorable adventures and plunder that my followers will not be scornful of accepting."

"I will not have it!" shouted the king.

Swain's eyes flared, but Eindridi Ungi intervened.

"There is much to be said in behalf of Erling's project," he counseled. "Surely, it will make a deep impression upon the emperor and other folk we chance to meet to encounter so many warriors of the North and perceive the prowess of which they are capable.

"Much glory will redound to you, Lord King, and I can promise you that the emperor will be grateful of the opportunity to meet such members of your court. He is a very war-like man, and much interested in the sports of the Frankish chiefs who go upon the Crusades, such as tilting with lances and fighting in enclosures for the sake of honor and merit. Men like Erling and Swain will be fresh evidence of our people's power, and if it ever chanced that you emulated the example of King Sigurd the Jorsalafarer, and went Crusading to the Holy Land, yourself, he would be the more ready to further you in all that you undertook."

"That is so," admitted King Ingi thoughtfully. "Perhaps you are right."

"But Swain has not agreed to accept my company," said Erling.

"If I say that you go, you go," the king declared haughtily.

"By your leave, I will not go with Swain, unless he invites me," persisted Erling.

"I shall be glad of your company," said Swain.

He laughed with no mirth in his tones.

"What a king has said, Swain has said," he added.

And he turned and strode from the hall without another word, Erik and Armod and Oddi at his heels. Men opened a path for them to the door.

CHAPTER III

OF THE EXPEDITION OF SWAIN, ERLING AND EINDRIDI UNGI, AND OF HOW THEY FARED FORTH FROM BJORGVIN TO THE SOUTH

SWAIN sat crossed-legged on the floor of the low-roofed poop-cabin of *Deathbringer*. His back was braced against a chest of weapons, on the lid of which were spread his sleeping-bag of bear's fur and his seal-cloak. From a beam overhead hung an iron lamp of whale-oil, whose smoky flame scarce revealed the bearded faces of Thorar and Leif, squatting opposite. In his hands Swain balanced three sticks, each of which bore two series of notches.

"We shall require fresh ale," he said thoughtfully, studying the notches, "and water, also. I think the salt meat will last, and there will be ample opportunity to replenish our provisions—with luck, without payment—after we are south of Bretland. Yes, we will let it go at ale and water—and five hundred arrows from the Bjorgvin fletchers, who do good work. Too many arrows we cannot have in faring so farward; there is wastage in every fight."

"I had three shields carried away in the storm three days since," volunteered Leif.

"They shall be replaced. What else?"

"Two of my young men have the belly sickness," said Thorar; "and old Arnold fell from the poop and cracked his leg bone."

"Set them ashore," answered Swain promptly. "Snorri Sigurd's son, of Westness, is in the city on his trading affairs. He will carry them back to the Orkneys for me, together with a message to Jarl Rognvald of my new intentions."

"Should we not purchase spare oars against the chance of loss?" asked Thorar.

"Six for each ship," decided Swain; "and let them be lashed fast under the benches."

The leather curtain which hung across the cabin entrance was thrust aside, and Erik's wizened face appeared.

"Erling and Eindridi are come aboard to talk with you, Swain," he said.

"Bring them hither," ordered Swain.

He tossed one of the notched sticks to each of his ship-captains.

"Keep strictly your tallies," he adjured them. "It will be my purpose never to venture too far from land, but we shall traverse seas unknown to me and hostile to all Northern folk, and it is likely we may require to husband our stores."

Feet thudded on the deck outside, and again the curtain was tossed aside. Erling entered first, stooping his ungainly frame to accommodate himself to the cramped quarters of the cabin. After him came Eindridi, whose high-crested helm, even when he bent his head, scraped the roof-planks, and whose silvered mail flashed a thousand reflections of the single flickering light.

Swain withdrew himself farther toward the stern-post, and motioned them to be seated beside him.

"I have been concerting my arrangements with my ship-captains," he said. "They are Thorar Asgrim's son and Leif Anakol's son."

The four men exchanged greetings and handfasted one another across the confined space.

"Your ships are well built," said Eindridi.

"They are Orkney built," replied Swain.

"I care not where they were wrought, they are as well built as our craft ever are," rejoined Eindridi with a touch of patronage in his voice.

Swain shrugged his shoulders.

"I know no better craft."

"That is because you have never traveled into the southern seas," retorted the Varangian. "The Greeks and the heathen build ships beside which this dragon is like one of your island barges."

"What does that matter?" asked Swain indifferently. "This serves."

"They have three rows of oars, one above another," pursued Eindridi. "And there are some—dromonds, they are called—which tower up like castles, and have three masts, all carrying sails."

"They should be easy to catch," remarked Swain.

"They are slow," admitted Eindridi, "but they stand so high out of the water that you would find it impossible to climb their sides."

"I should find a way," said Swain. "But this is of no moment. What do you wish to see me about?"

Eindridi was nonplussed by the abruptness of Swain's manner and his failure to impress the Orkneyman. He chewed at his mustache, and frowned; and Erling spoke to relieve the tension. The young lenderman had a voice which was both pleasant and low.

"Since we are to be viking comrades with you, Swain," he said, "we wish to discover your plans and do what we may to accommodate ourselves to them."

"My plans are simple," replied Swain. "I voyage to Mikligard. There I find Olvir Rosta, and slay him."

"It is not so simple as you think," cut in Eindridi sharply. "I say nothing concerning the merits of your quarrel with Olvir. That is your affair. But you are much mistaken if you suppose that you can go into Mikligard and execute your private vengence there, without interference from the emperor."

"I intend no harm to him and his folk," said Swain. "Why should he seek to come between me and a man who is outlawed?"

"You forget that Olvir is his man," Eindridi reminded him.

"When I tell him what Olvir is——"

"You do not know what you are speaking about, Swain," exclaimed the Varangian. "Mikligard is a great city; the emperor is the mightiest ruler in Christendom. King Ingi, even if he ruled all Norway, instead of half, would not be so powerful as one of the emperor's officers. Of us Varangians, alone, there are two thousand men, and after us are other guards, as well as the ordinary troops. They would swallow up any expedition which you might lead against them."

"But I do not intend to lead an expedition against them," answered Swain patiently. "I will tell my story to the emperor."

"And what then?" demanded Eindridi. "Why should the emperor believe you, rather than Olvir?"

"He will."

The Varangian clicked his teeth.

"Well, then, suppose that he does—although I do not agree with you. How will you find Olvir if he chooses to avoid you?"

"I will find him," said Swain.

"You do not know your task. In Mikligard the people are thick as the fallen leaves in Autumn. The houses stand row by row for mile after mile. You might search there a year, and not find the man you sought—especially, if the emperor aided him."

"I will take care of that," returned Swain. "It is in my mind, Eindridi, that you are not favorable to my voyage."

Eindridi started to speak, but Erling took the words from his mouth.

"You are unjust, Swain," he said. "You must consider that Eindridi is in a difficult position. He has supposed until now that Olvir Rosta was a stout comrade he could rely upon. You have fed him with suspicions. Perhaps you are right. Only time can show. In any case, Eindridi would be niddering to take your word, unsupported by evidence, against a man who has fought side by side with him, and as he has said, shared the same shield."

"That is true," agreed Swain. "Well, then, tell me this, Eindridi—how far will you stand my friend? Or Olvir's friend?"

Eindridi stroked his golden beard—it was of a brighter texture than Swain's, glossier, molten where the Orkneyman's was ruddy—and reflected.

"If what you predict is confirmed by the event," he decided, "I will support you to any extent, since that would mean that Olvir had acted as my enemy. But unless he has been laboring to undo me and win my place, I will stand clear of your feud after I have once made you known to the emperor and bespoken you to him as a man of note in these lands."

Swain turned to Erling.

"And you?"

"In this venture I am your comrade, Swain," replied Erling. "I will share whatever hazards you meet. I know that Olvir is an outlaw, and it is common talk that his last crime was to slay foully your mother, Asleif, after torturing your folk to endeavor to make them tell where your sons were hid. For such a man I have only hate."

"That is well," acknowledged Swain. "I am not one to forget friendship, Erling."

"So I have heard," said the lenderman.

Swain rapped on the floor until Erik came and put the door-curtain aside.

"Fetch ale for my guests," Swain bade him.

And when the ale-horns were at hand he drank courteously to their health.

"But there are more matters to be disposed of," remarked Eindridi, wiping his lips. "You have three ships. I have one, although she is a craft which can not fairly be compared with mere viking-dragons, and——"

"Hold," interrupted Swain. "Your ship pulls twenty-eight oars a side, I think?"

"That is the truth."

"*Deathbringer* pulls thirty."

Swain turned to Erling, ignoring the Varangian.

"What force do you purpose taking with you?" he inquired.

"I intended to take two long-ships, if you deemed that sufficient," answered Erling.

He looked from one to the other of his hearers.

"In an affair like this," he went on," I consider that one man should be chief, and inasmuch as you, Swain, have the greatest reputation of any man in the North for viking ventures, my suggestion is that you, who are also contributing three ships, be our leader."

Swain brought his ice-cold blue eyes to bear upon Eindridi's flushed face.

"I am a believer in the policy of arranging my plans as nearly as possible in harmony with those of my companions," he said. "What is your judgment, Eindridi?"

"Of course, I might purchase additional

ships," exclaimed the Varangian, "and I am besieged by sturdy carls who would seek adventure under my leadership."

"Undoubtedly," assented Swain. "Is it your intention, then, to do so?"

Eindridi picked at the embroidery of the double-headed eagle upon his breast.

"I will accept your advice and Erling's upon that," he said.

"You require ship-room for the recruits you carry with you," suggested Erling.

"Many of the men who came North with me are not returning," muttered Eindridi. "They will buy farms with the plunder they have gained."

"Ah," said Swain. "In that case, perhaps you could divide up your extra men among all our ships—that is, if you do not intend to purchase more ships for yourself."

Eindridi moistened his lips uncomfortably.

"I will do what is deemed best," he said half-defiantly. "But at the same time I remind both of you that this expedition began with me."

"I do not question that," answered Swain coolly. "It is likewise true that of us three you are the only one who has traveled the whole voyage before. And for that reason I suggest that you be chief."

Eindridi's mouth sagged, and Erling regarded Swain with increased interest. Across the cabin Thorar and Leif watched all three in silence, as became them—they had sailed many years with Swain—whatever course he adopted, they anticipated ultimate success.

"What have you to say, Erling?" Swain demanded bluntly, seeing that Eindridi was still speechless.

"If it pleases you, it pleases me," returned the young lenderman, blinking his eyes. "I have had less experience than either you or Eindridi, and it does not become me to set my opinion in counsel against yours."

"A modest man's opinion is frequently to be preferred to the counsel of experience," observed Swain and lapsed into silence.

For as long as it takes to kindle a flame no man spoke. Then, perceiving that Swain awaited an answer from him, Eindridi stirred uneasily on his haunches and said—

"It is not for me to name myself chief."

"It is your right—why not?" demanded Swain with a hint of derision.

Eindridi flushed again.

"It is my right, but I am not one of those who would ride rough-shod over others."

"As I am reputed to do," commented Swain. "Well, I have nominated you for chief, and Erling has assented. Will you accept?"

The Varangian peered at him warily, apparently suspecting a trap.

"It is right that I should lead," he declared at last. "And if all agree, I will do so."

"Then it is settled," said Swain. "Now, when do we start?"

"I can have my long-ships ready within the week," said Erling eagerly. "And I say nothing against King Ingi, but I would sail as soon as possible, lest he regret his promise to let me go."

"For myself, I will go any time," spoke up Eindridi; "but I must have an extra week to pick over my recruits. I had intended to remain the summer in Norway, but I learn that my father is dead and his estate in my elder brother's hands, so that there is no reason for me to delay."

The upshot of their discussion was that they agreed to sail that day two weeks, and Swain ordered in a second round of ale.

"Is it to be understood that you will not purchase more shipping?" he asked Eindridi when the horns were foaming.

"Yes, if you and Erling can find berths for five-score men aboard your five ships," returned the Varangian.

"You had better discuss that with Erik, my forecastle man, and Thorar and Leif here," answered Swain.

Erling said that he would find room for as many men as Swain could not carry, and then Eindridi went on deck with Swain's two ship-captains to talk over the necessary arrangements with them and Erik.

"Why did you allow Eindridi to make himself chief, Swain?" exclaimed Erling as soon as the others had departed.

Swain smiled faintly.

"He did not make himself chief; I made him."

Erling shook his head.

"I do not wish to dispute with you," he persisted; "but it seems to me that you permitted him to override you. And I was the more surprized at your so doing because I have always understood that you were a man jealous of having your own way."

"No man truly understands himself," returned Swain; "but my own opinion is tha my feeling is as you say. And it was for the reason that I desired to have my own way that I offered Eindridi the leadership."

"I do not see your intent," objected Erling.

"It is not difficult to see," said Swain. "Briefly, Eindridi is a man of much vanity, who thinks mostly of outward show. He was concerned that I should not seem to surpass him in this venture. Now, I must rely upon him to give me a fair introduction to the Emperor Manuel when we reach Mikligard, and it may be, too, that I shall require all the help I can find there. For these reasons I am very content that he should be our chief, and all the more so, because a man of his disposition can be flattered into adopting any plan we think desirable."

Erling's ugly face was contorted into a wide grin.

"I remember hearing that in the Orkneys the folk called you 'Jarl-maker'," he cried, "and that it was put about that Jarl Rognvald had said to Jarl Harald that really there were three Jarls in the island, Rognvald, Harald and Swain, and that the first two might be thankful the third was content with the power and had no inclination for a title."

"There are many things said about me which I do not hear," answered Swain.

"If they said that they said it with justice," retorted Erling, "for I perceive plainly that you are occupied with obtaining the substance of power and have no concern for the outward seeming of it."

"That is the truth," admitted Swain. "What is a title, if he who holds it must do as you desire him to?"

Erling clambered to his feet, all huddled over in the cramped cabin space, and chuckled with amusement.

"I will never forget this evening," he declared. "If the time ever comes I may exert my influence as I choose, I will try for the kernel of power and let other folk have the husks."

And it is to be remarked that in after years when Erling waxed to the full extent of his power in the land, and could set up whom he chose to be king, he resisted the temptation to name himself, as many men would have done, and placed the crown upon his son's head, instead. But none the less did he govern Norway.

"I have taken an arrow out of Swain's quiver," he told those who asked him why he followed this course.

WHEN two weeks had passed the three venturers put to sea from Bjorgvin haven with their six ships, and all the craft in the harbor shouted luck to them, with much clashing of shields and waving of ale-horns. King Ingi, himself, stood upon the strand, and men said that he remarked to those about him—

"This day is ill-fated for me, for if I am rid of Swain without a bicker or the loss of my crown, I am the poorer for lack of Erling to lean upon."

And, indeed, from that day began the increase of King Eystein's power, to the prejudice of King Ingi's interest.

Never before, since the skalds, did a fairer fleet or a finer band put to sea. Eindridi's dragon was such a mass of color that it blinded the eye to look upon her, but behind the painted bulwarks and under the silken tunics and silvered mail were brave hearts and dauntless. And aboard Swain's and Erling's ships were warriors no less to be depended upon in battle and storm for that their raiment was torn and their armor rusted.

On the poop of *Seamaiden* Eindridi stood, chanting a lay celebrating his deeds:

"High his helm the Varang leader
Bore amid the clang of weapons;
In the battle ever foremost,
Reddened he his gleaming spear-point
In the wounds of heathen warriors.
Thus Eindridi showed his prowess,
Thus he ravaged twenty cities."

"Ha," growled Swain from the thicket of his beard. "It seems that Eindridi has no need of skalds to celebrate his prowess!"

"He shall not sing alone!" cried Oddi, beside him on the poop.

The little skald battered sword-hilt on shield, and proclaimed lustily:

"See! The ships are lashed together.
See! The warriors fast are falling!
All their swords and axes swimming
In the life blood of the foemen.
Hearts are sinking—bowstrings screaming;
Darts are flying—spear-shafts bending;
Blades are biting—men are dying.
Swain is making food for ravens!

Oddi broke off his chant as a vicious wave upset his balance.

"Carry on my beginning, Armod," he shouted, clutching at the gunwale. "Let us see if you can succeed in improvising now as well as you did in Unna's inn."

Armod continued with no more delay than he required to open his mouth:

"Plundered ships and battered cities
Meet me everywhere I wander.
Marks are these of Swain's endeavors,
He who proves the strength of warriors.
Where he voyages grave-houghs rise;
There is heard the dismal howling
Of the gray wolf o'er the corpses."

"I foresee that I shall not lack for skald service," commented Swain drily. "But here is ship-work for strong hands. We require two men to each of the steering-oars in this sea. Do what you may, the pair of you!"

CHAPTER IV

OF HOW THE MIKLIGARD-FARERS SAILED TO VERBON, AND OF THE LADY ERMINGARD AND THE SUIT SHE MADE TO THEM

THE Spring gales were late that season, and the Mikligard-farers had rough weather all the way to the mouth of the Hvera*, which is in Nordymbraland in the realm of England. Oddi made a lay of it that the rowers sang as they tugged at the oars:

High the crests were of the billows
As we passed the mouth of Hvera;
Masts were bending, and the low land
Met the waves in long sand reaches;
Blind our eyes were with the salt spray,
While the youths at home returning
From the Thing-field fare on horseback.

Beyond Hvera Eindridi showed the signal for council, and *Seamaiden*, *Deathbringer* and Erling's dragon, *Farseeker*, were pulled close together so that the chiefs might stand at the prows and talk with each other.

"There is a rich coast to west of us," said Eindridi. "It seems best to me that we should make an onfall this night and ravage one of its villages."

Both Swain and Erling were surprized, but Erling said nothing, making a gesture to Swain to speak first.

"To do so would mean loss of time for us and man-scathe," said Swain then. "The English folk are sturdy fighters, Eindridi. Why should we depart from our path to seek trouble?"

"My reason is that my ship is out of provisions," replied Eindridi, "and as all men know, the English will not sell to viking-farers or have aught to do with our people."

"But how is it that you are short of provisions so soon?" inquired Erling. "My ships are still well found."

"And mine," said Swain.

Eindridi regarded them uncomfortably, and answered with a swagger—

"My elder brother withheld from me my just share of our inheritance, and I could purchase no more than I did."

Swain stared at the gay doublets and silvered mail of *Seamaiden's* crew and the sheen of color on her hull, beginning to dim under the constant scouring of the waves.

"It appears that you were able to outfit your men without regard to expense," he remarked.

"Would you have me belittle my master, the emperor, by garbing them as ordinary folk?" flared Eindridi.

"Humph," said Swain. "Erling, will you agree to combine with me to find stores for *Seamaiden* until we have passed these waters?"

"This is a common venture, and I am willing to share all that I have with the two of you," rejoined Erling.

Eindridi's face matched his tunic.

"It is foolishness for you to do so when we can go ashore and take what we please," he cried.

"And perhaps be taken ourselves," commented Swain. "The English of the east coasts are more warlike than those on the west. Not for more treasure than we are like to collect from them would I risk a raid on one of these Nordymbraland villages."

"I am chief," said Eindridi defiantly.

Swain called to Erik over his shoulder—

"We will sling a quarter of our stores aboard *Seamaiden*."

"Bethink you, Eindridi," urged Erling, "we are certain to need all our men for later ventures. Here should we acquire only hard knocks and scant glory."

The Varangian turned his back upon them.

"If you insist, there is no more for me to say," he answered coldly.

THEY coasted England without incident, passing the Narrow Seas under cover of night and then steered southeast along the shores of Valland.* All ships gave them sea-room, and one day became the next with a smoothness that belittled time. Sometimes they cruised at night if the weather was fine. Other nights they anchored or rode out the darkness with their prows unbridled. When the winds blew favorably they hoisted sails and the men sat on the rowing-benches and compared chiefs and told of deeds they had achieved in the past or listened to the songs of skalds. If there was no wind or it blew against them, the oar-rattle dinned in the waists, and the ships strove to take the lead, one from the others.

---

*The Wear.

*France.

By times it rained, and all were cold, for of the chiefs even Eindridi refused to sleep under cover in the poop-cabin, spreading his fur-bag or cloak wherever there was room on the deck, perhaps with a shield to shelter him. Again, there were days—and these days became more numerous as thev fared south—when the heat of the sun drove them to strip themselves as they rowed, and the sweat dripped on the benches, and the forecastle-men strode up and down the gangways, casting buckets of water over backs that strained to the bucking ash-sweeps. But no man complained.

"Who would bed in goose-down when the sea's breast is bared to him?" said Erik.

So they voyaged until they came to a city of Valland which was called Verbon and was situated upon a fair harbor open to the sea. Around the city was a high wall, and beside it stood a mighty castle. And inland from the city stretched a rich country of farms and villages.

Eindridi summoned Swain and Erling aboard his ship as they lay off the entrance to the harbor.

"Our stores are now so depleted that we must procure more food and water to keep our folk alive," he began.

"And for that neither Erling nor I are responsible," said Swain.

"Possibly, you would like to have me repay you for the stores you gave me," returned Eindridi with a sneer. "You do not seem anxious to employ your men in forays, so I will undertake single-handed to procure what is necessary for you as well as myself."

"No, no," denied Erling. "What we do, we will do together."

"What is your plan?" demanded Swain.

"I will go ashore, and seize what we require."

"It would be impossible for our entire force to capture the city," answered Swain.

"We need not capture the city," said Eindridi. "We will raid the open country. All the Vallska folk will have fled within the walls as soon as our sails were sighted."

"That seems to be a sensible plan," remarked Erling, looking to Swain for confirmation.

But Swain shook his head.

"I am not one to risk a single house-carl's life unless I must or can see a gain worth while," he declared. "My judgment is that we should go peacefully to the city, and ask the people to sell us enough food to meet our needs."

"I can not afford that," snapped Eindridi. "Moreover, it is contrary to viking custom to pay for provisions."

"In this case I place the success of our expedition ahead of viking custom," answered Swain. "Moreover I will purchase whatever is necessary, seeing that the suggestion is mine."

"Not so," cried Erling. "I am a man of wealth, and it shall not be said that I suffered Swain to bear the burden of our expenses."

Eindridi laughed scornfully.

"Certainly, your wealth must mean little to the pair of you," he said. "Why do you not ask the lord of the city to give you food?"

"That is a good idea," said Swain. "Perhaps he will. Let us don our mail, and make as favorable an impression upon him as we can."

The thought of the appearance he would present at the head of his men, in their crimson tunics and silvered mail, put Eindridi in humor with the plan, and he pushed it enthusiastically. They furbished up their ships, cleaned their armor and weapons, and then, with *Seamaiden* in the lead, her gilded dragon prow slicing through the wave-tops, they rowed up the harbor. Poops and forecastles bristled with spears; archers stood in the gangways; beside the mailed oarsmen lay sword and ax, and the shield slots in the gunwales were filled. But on the poop of *Seamaiden* Eindridi raised a peace-shield, and all the crews were cautioned not to touch a weapon unless an open attack was launched at them.

Many people watched the long-ships from the city's walls, and on the battlements of the castle stood a group of the most wondrously lovely maidens the Northmen had ever seen. Swain, himself, who was noted for his lack of interest in women, regarded them in amazement. Eindridi and Erling, Armod and Oddi, had eyes for little else.

"Here is more than ordinary loot, Swain," shouted Erling, as his ship forged abeam of *Deathbringer's* stern.

"There are rare fillies in that stable," agreed Swain, "but my advice is not to examine them too closely. A woman and trouble go together."

"You are old before your time," retorted Erling, laughing.

Armod stared up at the castle, his lips fastened by the rapture which shone in his face; but Oddi capered on one foot and exclaimed:

"See, see, Longshanks! What tagged lines would fit those beauties?"

Eindridi removed the helmet from his head, and bowed in homage as his ship crawled under the castle wall; his men followed his example, and one by one, the other crews imitated them. Swain hesitated a moment, snorted in his beard and then doffed his helmet, too.

From the group of maidens stepped one lovelier than the others, a tall, willowy creature, whose wind-whipped black hair was bound by a fillet of pearls. She hung over the battlements an instant, laughing down at the armored decks of the longships, waved her hand in a gesture of acknowledgment and disappeared.

Armod flung up his arms as if to draw her back, and his splendid voice rang out so that it was heard on ship and shore:

"Lady on the high-built wall,
I would fly, though I should fall,
To you through the jealous air;
But I know that I am not
Worthy of a single knot
Of your midnight-shaming hair."

"Well sung, Armod!" shouted Eindridi. And the Varangian snatched a gold ring from his wrist and tossed it across the water to the skald's feet.

"You should be on *Seamaiden*," growled Swain.

"Not I," returned Armod, slipping the ring over his wrist. "Eindridi is too much the skald, himself, to suffer a better in his service."

No man of the city sought to stay the strangers, and when they came to anchor in the port a nobleman of grave years and lofty mien boarded Eindridi's dragon and had speech with the chiefs.

"The Lady of the city sends you greeting by me," he said, "and bids you welcome, since she doubts not that men of your seeming are honorable and come in peace."

Of the three venturers Swain spoke best the Vallska speech, having learned it in the course of frequent forays in that country, and therefore he answered the envoy.

"We are viking-farers from the North," he said, "and we voyage to Mikligard, where certain of our number are in the service of the Emperor Manuel."

The old noblemen had looked uncertain when Swain called his party vikings, but at the mention of the emperor his face cleared.

"In that case," he replied, "the Lady Ermingard bids you by me to seek refreshment in Verbon, for you must be weary from your journey."

"How is it that your city is governed by a woman?" asked Swain.

"Because her father, the Count Godfrey, died recently, leaving no sons," explained the old man. "And now—" he gave his visitors a sly look—"we are searching for a young man of valor and promise to wed with her and govern us in her name."

"*Humph*," said Swain. "We are pressed for time, but we will tarry a day or so until our stores are replenished."

The envoy offered at once to send aboard a quantity of food and wine for the crews, and invited Swain and his principal men to attend a banquet in the castle. Swain was reluctant to consent, but both Eindridi and Erling were anxious to go, and he saw no way of refusing without offending the Vallska folk. So in the end the three chiefs accompanied the old man to the shore, and with them went Armod, Oddi and the ship-captains and forecastle-men.

In the castle were many warriors and serving-varlets, and all things needful for the comfort of a great lord. The old nobleman who had welcomed the viking-farers conducted them to a hall built of stone with a roof as lofty as the mast of Eindridi's dragon. On the floor were strewn fresh rushes, and scores of places were set at the long tables, but their guide escorted the chiefs of the Northmen to a table on a dais of stone, and as they mounted it the lady of the pearl-bound hair came to meet them from a narrow doorway, and after her a band of sisters who were inferior only by comparison with herself.

"A fair greeting to you, strangers from

the sea," she said in a voice that pealed like silver bells. "Right glad am I that you honor me by turning aside from the adventures you seek for the advancement of your names. I long to hear the tale of your achievements, for well I know that three such warriors have traveled far and compassed high endeavors."

She addressed herself directly to Swain, who stood at the right hand of the old nobleman, their guide, and smiling blithely into his frosty eyes, extended a hand as slim and white as a snowdrop. Swain mumbled in his beard, gripped her hand in his horny fingers and wrung it twice. She winced, and Eindridi exclaimed under his breath, pushed Swain aside and caught up her reddened fingers.

"Mind not this old viking here," he said, in mingled Norse and Vallska bending his lips to her hand. "Some of us have known other than the bower-maidens of an Orkney steading, and we take joy in paying homage to one more lovely than the stars. Surely, Lady, not even at the Greek emperor's court have I looked upon so beauteous a face."

The tinkle of her laughter rewarded him.

"As surely, Northman, have your wanderings carried you other where than the clashing lists and the arrow-swept decks of fighting ships. Who are you who come from the cruel sea?"

Eindridi flung back the cloak that draped his crimson tunic.

"I am Eindridi Ungi, a lenderman of Norway and captain of the Varang Guards of the Greek emperor."

"You must tell me of Constantinople—what is it you call it? Mikligard—and of its court. And who are these, your companions?"

Eindridi undertook to name them, one by one, but under her constant fire of questions his command of Vallska broke down and he was obliged to appeal to Swain. The lady was vastly amused.

"So, Lord of the Ruddy Beard," she cried to Swain, "you who can say so little for yourself yet can say more than he whose words flow easily?"

"I am accustomed to the company of warriors," replied Swain bluntly. "My tongue does not twist itself about pretty sayings."

"I perceive as much. And the lord of the ugly face and kindly eyes? What of him?"

Swain smiled grimly.

"Of us three, Lady, he is the most notable. He sits at the right hand of King Ingi of Norway."

"I judge a man by his face and his deeds, not by where he sits. And yourself?"

"I am even what my comrade said, an old viking-rover."

"With a voice to roar down the tempest, and a heart of ice. The saints send our southern sun may melt your hardness, Lord Swain! Come! You shall sit here at my right hand, though you have not that place with your king. And the Lord Eindridi shall be upon my left."

"What of Erling, here?" asked Swain. "He is——"

"The most notable of you all. So you have said. Well, then, he may sit next you, for I find no pleasure in his face. There is too much beauty in the world to waste time on ugliness."

SHE ordered them as though they had been men-at-arms, and all her folk she ranked about her in similar fashion. Armod and Oddi and the others of the Northmen she placed at one of the tables below the dais. And then two heralds blew upon trumpets, and a line of varlets staggered in from the kitchens, carrying such variety of foods and wines as made the hungry viking-farers doubly hungry to look upon; and the Lady Ermingard, herself, poured out the wine for the three chiefs, and drank first from each cup, both in sign of her friendship and in accordance with the custom of the country, to prove that the wine was not poisoned.

After they had eaten she had in a troop of her maidens, who sang and danced so as to charm all beholders, and herself, she recited a lay of her people concerning a wandering lord who came to a great city and wooed the daughter of the lord thereof. And when she had done she turned to Swain, speaking thus:

"Some there might be who would see more than the words tell in my lay. Will you not entertain us in your own fashion?"

"I am no skald, Lady," rejoined Swain, "nor am I good at guessing hidden meanings."

She surveyed him from beneath the lashes of her eyes.

"Perhaps that is so, and perhaps it is not," she answered. "But perhaps, too, I can try elsewhere."

And she spoke next to Eindridi.

"Have you no song to give in answer to mine?" she asked.

Eindridi started up from his seat.

"That have I, though none be worthy of you," he cried.

And he sang what men have since come to call "The Lay of Ermingard" which begins in this wise:

Lady fair! Thy form surpasses
All the loveliness of maidens.
Goddess of the yellow arm-rings,
Ermingard shall I remember
When the battle storms about me
And the eagle's claws I redden.

He sang in the Norse speech, so that she could not understand him, but when Swain translated his meaning she took from her hand a ring of gold and presented it to Eindridi.

"If you are as strong a warrior as a verse-maker your like is not to be found in this land," she said. "Can the Lord Erling sing?"

Erling shook his head bashfully.

"I am a young man," he said, "and have much to learn."

"And I am a young maid, and have more to learn," she replied lightly. "A modest man is always interesting. How if we learned together?"

"I might not keep up with you, Lady," rejoined Erling.

"Then will I have none of you," she exclaimed. And appealed to Swain again, "Who else of your company can entertain us?"

Swain crooked his finger at Armod.

"Here is a most famous skald," he said. "He can sing lays and recite sagas. Let us hear what you know, Armod."

And to the amazement of the Lady Ermingard, Armod arose and sang a lay in the Vallska tongue, with the same emphasis and stresses that the Lady and her maidens had employed.

"Who is this man?" she demanded as Armod made an end.

"I have told you. He is a skald," replied Swain.

"A common man?"

"With us no skald is a common man."

"But he is not a lord?" she insisted.

"No," said Swain.

"That is a pity," she decided, eying Armod's tall figure and lambent eyes. "He should be a stalwart warrior."

"He is," Swain assured her.

She said nothing for a while, looking from one to another of them, until at last Swain said that they must return to their ships, since the night was waxing late.

"You shall not go yet," she answered quickly. "No, no, Lord Swain, such guests do not come to me often. I have given orders that you lodge in the castle."

Swain frowned and his fingers crept toward his sword-hilt. But the Lady Ermingard shook her head, smiling.

"I am no enemy," she said. "Would you expect treachery from an unwed maiden?"

"No man knows what to expect of a woman," snarled Swain.

"You are not courteous," she charged, "I have much to think upon, and I would not have you go before I have concluded my thoughts. It may be one of you can answer a question for me."

"Or ask one," growled Swain.

"Or ask one," she repeated. "I am one eager to say what is expected of me by a friend, Swain."

"*Humph,*" rumbled Swain.

She let her eyes flit from his face to Eindridi's, and Armod's, then to Erling's—but for the barest breath—and back to Swain's.

"You are all proper men," she said.

"In our degree," assented Swain.

She ticked them off on her fingers.

"You are strongest; the Lord Eindridi is handsomest; the Lord Erling is ugliest and eke most modest; the skald is the mightiest lover."

"There is another skald," remarked Swain humorously.

"Who? Who?" she cried. "Why did you not——"

Swain indicated Oddi.

"That little man!" she protested. "What could he sing or say that would interest me?"

"Who can tell?" echoed Swain.

CHAPTER V

OF HOW EINDRIDI AND ARMOD WOULD HAVE WED THE LADY ERMINGARD, AND OF WHAT SWAIN MOVED TO DO THEREAT.

BY SWAIN'S urgence the ship-captains and forecastlemen were sent forth of the castle to their vessels, but the Lady Ermingard insisted that the chiefs and the two skalds should become her guests. They were escorted to a sumptuous chamber upon an inner court of the castle, where every arrangement had been made for their comfort. Deep couches were spread; soft rugs carpeted the floor; in an adjacent room baths awaited them; and serving-varlets were at hand to fetch and carry, to aid them in shifting their mail or in donning the silken robes presented them in the Lady's name.

"Here are all things a man may require!" exclaimed Eindridi, when they were alone once more. "I am of a mind to possess them for myself."

"Each man suits his own taste," rasped Swain.

"It is not Norway," said Erling.

"No, here the sun shines the year long," answered Eindridi. "I have no great love for Norway that sent me to seek my fortune as a portionless youth. And where in Norway would you find so strong a borg, so rich a city, so beauteous a maid?"

"She will love right heartily the man she weds," said Armod moodily. "Are you for her or for her property, Eindridi?"

"I consider myself such a champion as she needs to defend her," retorted the Varangian. "Beware of your words, skald, and look not above your station."

"Behold how skald berates skald," mocked Oddi.

"Are you, too, a rival for the Lady's hand?" asked Erling, laughing.

"We skalds should fight behind the one shield," rejoined Oddi.

"No, no, little man," denied Swain. "The Lady will have none of you. You are too small. 'What could he sing or say that would interest me?' quoth she."

Oddi glared.

"Ho," he cried. "I am too small! Perhaps there is more to this lay than has been sung."

"That is my opinion," replied Swain. "We can not afford to have dissensions in our midst at the beginning of our voyage."

"Who speaks of dissensions invites them," said Eindridi.

Swain shrugged his shoulders.

"I said that a woman and trouble came together," he reminded them.

"Not so," protested Erling. "Here is a fair field for all who fancy it."

"Not for you!" jeered Swain roughly. "You are the 'lord of the ugly face' to her. She has thrust you aside with Oddi."

Erling's craggy features slowly crimsoned.

"I am not vain of myself," he answered with a faint stammer, "but there is a saying that 'fair of heart is fair of face.' "

"That is a saying of the North, not of the South," thrust in Oddi. "Eindridi and Armod are both of the South, albeit Norseborn."

"And what of Swain?" demanded Eindridi. "I have not heard him decry the chance of becoming Lord of Verbon."

"It is not necessary that I should do so," snapped Swain. "All men know that I have no use for women—as, also, that I have a wife who is lodged in a nunnery of the Syllingar.* She was all the experience I crave with her kind."

Armod swept back the long locks from his forehead.

"It is not seemly that we should contest her name as though she was some Lettish thrall-woman," he said. "If, in her graciousness, she deigns to look favorably upon one so unworthy——"

"Speak for yourself," objected Eindridi. "Here is no game for skalds to play. Verbon demands a warrior, a friend of princes."

"Nevertheless," spoke up Erling, "there is justice in what Armod says. I am too ugly; Oddi is too small; and Swain will not look at the cross-bench. But as between warrior-skald and skald-warrior I see little to choose. Let the Lady decide."

"You are all bewitched," growled Swain. "Will you sacrifice a brave venture for a woman?"

"Not for a woman, alone," answered Eindridi, "but for a rich city and a strong borg and wealth to buy a man high rank and power."

"To wed Ermingard would be the fairest venture a man might follow," cried Armod.

Swain ignored him, and turned upon the Varangian.

"You made an undertaking with me," he said. "Will you forego it?"

"I will pay you fine and recompense, Swain," returned Eindridi uneasily. "You shall go——"

"You pledged yourself to guide us to Mikligard and present us to the emperor! I hold you to the promise."

"I should be witless did I pass by the opportunity that is extended to me," asserted Eindridi.

Swain laughed in derision.

---

*The Scilly Islands. *Vide* "Swain's Sons."

"Are you so certain she will choose you?"

Eindridi laughed back at him.

"There is no vanity in that, Swain," he retorted. "You will not; she has no eye for Erling. Who else is there but me?"

"There is Armod, who is fitter than any of you!" exclaimed Oddi.

"A skald to be the count of a province!" Eindridi snorted. "The world is not ordered so."

"*Humph*," growled Swain. "The world is not ordered solely in accord with your fancies. I might say no more, Eindridi, but for the fact that I require you with me to put me in the way of securing vengeance upon my enemy. If you abandon us here, you injure me."

"If I did not, I should injure myself," defended Eindridi.

"Swain has brought me to see the affair differently," interposed Erling. "For myself, I joined this expedition both to gain honor and to assist him. I shall stay with him."

A light of mingled humor and kindliness sparkled in Swain's frosty eyes.

"I shall not forget this, Erling," he promised. "Are you with me, too, Oddi?"

The little skald gave him a whimsical glance.

"You have taken care of that—but I will do naught in despite of Armod."

"It is not my intent to ask you to," returned Swain. "Well, Armod, what say you?"

"What can I say?"

The skald's face was aglow with a great light.

"I am human, Swain. Shall I disdain a love no man has ever known the like of?"

"I can not inform you," answered Swain drily. "Such matters are beyond my intelligence. But I may say that both you and Eindridi are plucking your apples in the bud. It is possible a frost may kill them before fruiting."

Eindridi reached for his sword, a black scowl on his brow.

"I like not this talk of killing," he grumbled.

Swain's eyes became two daggers of cold flame.

"Be satisfied," he warned.

The Varangian dropped back upon his couch with an elaborate yawn.

"Ah, well, it is late. Give over argument, and let us sleep."

But Oddi was not yet content.

"Swain," said he, "did the Lady Ermingard truly say what you repeated?"

"As what?" parried Swain.

"That I was too small and Erling too ugly?"

"That did she. Would you hold that I invented it?"

"Why, no," answered Oddi slowly. "But she could not have better served your purpose."

"You have a keen wit, little man," chuckled Swain. "But the truth is always a better weapon than lies—and it can be handled more accurately."

Erling strangled a yawn.

"You do not seem to regard this matter very seriously, Swain," he said half-reproachfully.

"Why should I?" countered Swain. "Two men have seen a fair maid and take credit that she has cast favoring eyes upon them. That is all."

"Yet a moment past you were complaining that you had been betrayed by reason of it," sneered Eindridi.

"And so I might be," rejoined Swain "But I shall not."

In the morning the Lady sent one of the youths who attended her to bid them come to her where she sat with her maidens upon a terrace overlooking the sea. Eindridi and Armod made off at once, but Swain detained Erling and Oddi and followed at a more leisurely pace.

"Look you," he asked, "are you two of a mind to assist me to keep our venture intact?"

"I am," answered Erling.

"And I, if you do not seek to humble Armod," said Oddi. "He is a poor enough skald and his head has been turned, but we have shared ill-fortune together."

"My intention is to save Armod from himself," replied Swain. "And Eindridi, also. They both merit better than to become shield-bearer for a woman."

"It might be said that you would protect them out of self-interest, Swain," Oddi remarked slyly.

"I do," returned Swain. "But what I say is still true. How do you think the Vallska folk would look upon a lord of foreign birth? Moreover, it is well said that the penniless husband of a wealthy wife is the thrall of her family."

And then he told them of his plan and described their parts in it, and they laughed and promised to execute it as he bade them.

“You are right, Swain,” admitted Oddi. “Armod would not know what to do with wealth if he had it. He would give all he had to any man who pleased him with a song or to the first woman who smiled at him.”

“And Eindridi would become so swollen with pride that a treacherous house-carl might betray him,” added Erling. “There is a poison in the air of this borg, Swain. I am more lucky than wise that I have escaped it.”

“There are times when a man may be thankful for an ugly face,” commented Swain.

WHEN they emerged upon the terrace of the castle Eindridi was telling tales of his exploits beside the Lady Ermingard’s chair, and close by Armod was singing for a group of her maidens; and Swain observed that the Lady was not so immersed in Eindridi’s tales but that she could spare an occasional glance in the skald’s direction.

Swain affected unconcern, and stood apart, gazing over the terrace wall; but he was not long alone, for presently the Lady rose from her place and tripped across the grass to his side.

“Why do you not join with us, Lord Swain?” she asked. “You need not hold yourself aloof with the ugly lord and the little skald.”

“Oh, there is no place for me where Eindridi and Armod are,” replied Swain. “I am only a fighter. Viking-faring is my trade—not capturing women’s fancy.”

“You speak as if they two did little else,” she cried.

Swain smiled.

“Men say that never before in the North were two such lovers,” he said. “You must have Oddi recite you ‘The Lay of Eindridi’s Loves.’ Armod is a poor man, and not so well known, but he can recite love songs of his own.”

The Lady frowned and crooked her finger to Oddi.

“What is this ‘Lay of Eindridi’s Loves’ that the Lord Swain tells me of?” she demanded.

Oddi sprang forward eagerly.

“Ah, that is a very noble lay, beautiful lady,” he answered in his halting Vallska. “There is none other like it. First, do you see, there is the ‘Tale of the White Maid,’ Greja of Uppland—she who cast herself in the Fja Brook for love of him. Then there is Astrid’s Lament. Sad is that, ah, very sad! And ‘The Death of Helga Raffn’s Daughter,’ whom he would not wed for that her kinsmen demanded it. But some have accounted the finest of all ‘The Heart of Frida,’ who put after him in the open boat the first time he sailed from Norway. And——”

“Peace, peace!” she begged. “All these—did he——”

She stumbled for words, and Oddi rushed on:

“Oh, that is not the half of them, Lady! And in Greece, men say——”

“I would hear no more,” she checked him. “So that is the kind of man he is! A breaker of maid’s hearts!”

“He is a great lover,” protested Swain, quick to defend his friend. “Where shall you find a better?”

“Say, rather, a better thief,” she retorted. “No, I will hear no more.”

And she turned her back upon them, and walked slowly toward the castle door. Eindridi and Armod marked her departure, and both started to follow her; but the maids who surrounded the skald held him back, and Eindridi reached her side first.

“Will you so soon depart from us?” exclaimed the Varangian. “I have another tale, of——”

“I have heard sufficient tales of you,” she cut him off. “You are handsome of face, my lord, but the heart of you must be all black.”

Eindridi flamed to wrath.

“Who has been filling your ears with lies? Has Swain——”

“Swain may be rough in his ways, but I would sooner have him by me than you, stealer of women’s hearts!” she panted.

“Swain!” jeered Eindridi. “You know little of him to talk so! He has not told you that he, himself, stole a woman and forced her to wed him, and that he keeps her now shut in the loneliest nunnery in the world, far in the Western Ocean. That is how Swain treats women! They are fortunate when he does not beat them.”

The Lady Ermingard halted in her tracks.

“Did you hear, Lord Swain?” she asked.

Swain nodded composedly.

“It is true,” he said. “I enjoy beating women. I have found it necessary in handling them.”

"Then is there no room for you in my castle," she declared, "for it is sacred to women. Go! Before I bid my men-at-arms stone you forth."

Eindridi, his face a mask of rage, made to draw his sword.

"This is all your doing, Swain," he snarled. "I am of a mind——"

"My patience is at the bottom of the sack," interrupted Swain curtly. "Say no more."

And to the Lady Ermingard he went on:

"Since you wish it, we will go. Hither, Armod!"

She gave him a bitter stare.

"There is one of you who is honorable—and he a man of no degree! I would sooner have that skald by me, though his surcoat be in tatters and his mail patched, than one of you Northern wolves."

"Armod is as hardy a man of his hands as any," replied Swain carelessly. "It is a pity about the curse."

Erling wagged his head.

"Ah, yes, that curse! It will yet trouble us, Swain!"

The Lady Ermingard forgot her anger in a sudden gust of curiosity.

"What curse?" she asked.

Erling peered over his shoulder toward Armod, who had broken free of the bevy of maidens.

"It is naught against Armod, Lady," explained the young lenderman. "But the truth is that his ancestors were priests of Odin, and there has been a curse on him and his folk ever since."

She crossed herself, with a shudder.

"But, surely, Holy Church could——"

Erling wagged his head again.

"They have impoverished themselves, seeking to be rid of it."

"But—but—what is it?"

Erling looked to Swain, who looked away, then at Armod, almost upon them, and back at Swain.

He cleared his throat.

"Why——"

Oddi leaned forward mysteriously.

"You see how handsome he is, Lady?"

She nodded, fascinated.

"That is it!" said Oddi triumphantly. "They suck up beauty from all those they have to do with. All the women of their family become hags; the men are such as Armod there."

The Lady Ermingard gave a little shriek of horror.

"Oh, blessed saints! Oh, Clarisande! Oh, Aglivaine! Call up Father Ramois! The strangers are war-locks and foul fiends to tempt us in disguise!"

She caught up a tiny golden cross from her breast and raised it before her.

"Back!" she cried. "Stand back, in the name of the Blessed Saviour and the Trinity!"

Armod regarded her in entire bewilderment.

"What is amiss, fair Lady?" he asked gently. "Who has injured you?"

"You!" she clamored. "Demons from the sea! Oh, Holy Mother, hear me! I pledge a new chapel on the south front of the minster church if we are delivered safe from this sore peril."

"But here is no peril, Lady," replied Armod. "Each one of us cheerfully would lay down his life that you might walk in comfort as you please."

"Hear him!" she sobbed. "It is so he wins the victims of his curse! Ah, what a peril for a young maid! The little man has all the look of a familiar—and of the three other big men, one is as cruel, one as lustful and one as ugly as the beasts. Ah, God, what shall I do?"

Her outcries had gradually drawn the attention of certain members of the castle's company, who clustered upon the walls which overlooked the terrace and fingered their weapons in a way which caused Swain no little concern.

"There is no necessity for you to berate us," he said now, contorting his features into a demoniac grin. "Since we have failed here, we will return to our ships."

"Failed!" she whimpered. "I pray that you have, but how can I be sure that you have left me my soul?"

"Why, I will tell you," rejoined Swain practically. "Say no more, and bid your people stand aside, and I will promise to go without taking it."

"But how can I be sure of your promise?"

"You can not be sure, otherwise," Swain pointed out, "than as I pledge myself and my comrades."

"Go," she answered, covering her face with her hands. "God send you have none of you overlooked us!"

"Let your people stand in my path, and we will overlook them so that they will all be rotted," threatened Swain.

"Oh, go," she repeated. "I ask no more than that."

"Not I," shouted Eindridi Ungi. "I have done naught that I should flee to please Swain."

"Nor I," pronounced Armod. "Lady, you have been deceived——"

But she fled from them as Swain seized an arm of each.

"Gather your wits," he ordered sternly. "Death and torment await you if we linger. Haste! Or we shall not be able to carry our ships to sea."

They passed from the terrace into the cavernous stone halls of the castle, and so, through inner court and ward to the outer gate, where the keeper would have stayed them. But Swain pushed the man aside.

"The Lady has commanded that we repair to our ships," he said.

Armod walked as if he was in a dream, his eyes fixed always upon some object beyond the sight of other men. But Eindridi still fumed and spluttered as they traversed the stones of the quay and the first arrows hissed about them.

Erik had seen them coming; saw, too, the buzz of activity on the towering walls, the sudden arrow hail, heard the harro and outcry at the gate; and he acted without awaiting orders. As they ran out upon the quay the mooring-ropes were cast off and the rowers commenced to back out into the harbor. Long before the pursuit had gained the water's edge the Northmen were an arrow-flight from shore, and the Vallska folk, even with an outraged countess to urge them on, had no inclination to put to sea after six viking-ships. They preferred, instead, to gather upon their walls, and like the Lady Ermingard, watch the low hulls dwindle into the west.

CHAPTER VI

OF HOW THE MIKLIGARD-FARERS ASSAILED A CASTLE IN SPAINLAND AND SECURED PROVISIONS THEREBY

AS THE long-ships drew out of the harbor of Verbon Eindridi brought *Seamaiden* abeam of *Deathbringer*, and stood on the gilded bulwarks with a spear in his hand. Erik and other men rushed aft with shields to protect Swain, but he waved them back.

"I ward myself," he said. "Ho, Eindridi, what man-scathe have I done you?"

"It is I who shall do the man-scathe," retorted Eindridi, "for you have made a mock of me."

"I have saved you from yourself. Yet if you will not listen to reason I shall have no objection to casting spears with you."

Eindridi heaved back his arm to hurl the spear; his features were convulsed with fury; he staggered from the excess of his temper.

"Take my advice and wait until your arm is steady," called Swain. "Here is Armod, who has as much cause for complaint as you, and he has as yet said nothing."

"A man's life is no recompense for a lost maid," cried Armod.

And before Eindridi could recover his balance and cast the spear, Erling shoved the nose of his ship between *Deathbringer* and *Seamaiden*, and joined his voice to Swain's.

"What will be accomplished if you slay Swain or he slays you?" he shouted. "It will only mean the deaths of more of us, and the destruction of our expedition."

"I care not," replied Eindridi. "Swain has done me a wrong which can not be wiped out by payment of booty or raw gold."

"As to that, I should say that you would have first done him a wrong," rejoined Erling. "Bide until we anchor for the night, and let us talk this out as becomes warriors."

Many of Eindridi's people came about him, and begged him to be reasonable and not commence a battle against heavy odds, for they saw that Erling was inclined to side with Swain, and that would have meant five ships to one. The end of it was that Eindridi threw down his spear.

"I have not said the last word," he warned; "but my life is my own, and if I see fit to risk it with Swain I shall do so."

At night they rode under the lee of an island which would protect them from the freshening wind that blew out of the northeast, and the chiefs landed upon the island's beach to discuss their differences, while the men hunted the rocks for shellfish or baited hooks to drop in the pools, for they were as short of provisions as they had been when they entered Verbon, in consequence of the haste with which they had left the city.

Eindridi started to rail at Swain as he had before, although he did not touch his weapons, but Swain cut him off short.

"In this dispute," he said, "I am willing to leave the decision to your own men. You agreed to carry them to Mikligard and find them employment there. If I had let you do as you sought to in Verbon they must have stayed with you among the Vallska folk or else have found their way home as best they could. I do not know whether you consider that honorable or not but I am quite sure what they would say."

Eindridi was so angry that at first he was speechless.

"It is impossible for us to be friends," he declared. "It is too much that you should undertake to create trouble amongst my men."

"I shall not create trouble for you," answered Swain. "It is you who will be responsible for whatever is done."

"This dispute should be terminated," cried Erling. "I am frank to say to you, Eindridi, that my opinion is that you owe us an obligation to remain with us. Swain was justified in devising matters so that you should be compelled to do so."

"It is easy for you to say that," exclaimed Eindridi. "You had no chance with the Lady Ermingard."

"This is not a question of a woman, but of a man's honor," said Swain bleakly before Erling could speak. "There are two issues from it—one is that you shall forget the past, and in that case we will reestablish our friendship; the second is that you persist in fighting me, and in that case I will tell all to your men, and if they approve of it, fight you, man to man."

But now Erling and Erik and the ship-captains and forecastle-men of the whole fleet besought Eindridi not to press matters; and in part because he was already ashamed of himself for having been inclined to disregard his undertakings, and also, because he realized that he stood little chance against Swain and would have trouble with all the others, no matter what happened, he submitted with an ill grace and agreed to bury their differences.

Swain promptly offered him his hand.

"I would rather be your friend than your enemy, Eindridi," said the Orkneyman. "And now I would ask you, as chief among us, to consider the plight we are in for food, for there is so little aboard my ship that presently we shall have scraped bare the meal-barrels. Of ale we have none."

Eindridi was flattered that Swain should appeal to him so and acknowledge him publicly as commander of the expedition.

"Friends shall we be," he agreed, "and I would have you and all the rest of our number believe that I desire to deal fairly by you. As for food, my suggestion is that we should make an onfall upon the next village we sight."

Swain and Erling assented to this plan, and they all returned aboard their vessels; but in the morning a storm blew them off the coast and southward. For three days they ran before it, keeping company only with the greatest difficulty, and when at last they steered inshore for shelter and a secure haven in which to repair their damages Eindridi warned them that the coast they saw was Spainland, where was always fierce fighting between the native folk and the heathen from Serkland who had conquered the better part of the country.

"Well and good," said Swain. "Where there is fighting there is plunder."

"And it is to be remarked," added Erling, "that it is easier to die fighting than from hunger."

This was forenoon of the fourth day and all were faint and weary, but they took to their oars with stout hearts and rowed past a headland into an estuary where stood a sizable village, and on a hillside above, a fine castle. Eindridi ordered the ships beached by the river-bank and landed five hundred men, intending to capture the village and whatever store of provisions it might contain. But no sooner was the shield-wall formed than a group of villagers appeared on the shore close by and hailed them in the Vallska tongue, demanding to know if they were Christians. Swain replied that they were and came seeking food.

"We will give you all the food that you require," replied an old man who was chief of the native folk, "if you will aid us to overthrow the heathen lord who occupies the castle on the hill and oppresses us and all other Christians this side of the marches."

"Why should we aid you when we can take what we need?" retorted Swain.

"But you can not," said the old man, "for if you will not combine with us we will join forces with the heathen lord, and together we shall be strong enough to drive you back into the sea."

"I do not believe that to be possible," answered Swain, feeling his way toward the most advantageous bargain.

"Nevertheless, it is," asserted the old chief. "And we will also remove or destroy our food, rather than allow it to fall into your hands; and if you persist in attempting to seize it we will send for a priest who will blast you with curses which will ensure your damnation."

Swain was not much impressed by this argument, but several of his people who had enough Vallska to follow the conversation urged him not to drive the natives too far.

"Suppose that we purchase food from you," he suggested then.

But the old chief shook his head.

"We will not yield you any food readily, save for the price of your assistance to carry the heathen lord's castle," he said stubbornly. "That is little enough to ask of brother Christians."

"You are a fool," returned Swain. "Why should I risk my men's lives for you? I prefer to take my chance to seize whatever food is stored in your village."

"No, it is you are the fool," cried the old chief, "for if you do as you say you will lose many more men, you will gain little food and you will miss the opportunity to loot the treasures of the heathen in the castle.".

"Oh, ho," said Swain. "There is treasure in the castle!"

"A great treasure."

"And how do you know that?"

"Have we Christians not been tortured to wring it from us?" countered the old chief.

"Will you yield it all to us?" asked Swain.

"All," promised the old chief.

"And as much food as we require, now and until we depart?"

"You shall lack for nothing," the old chief agreed eagerly.

And all his folk who had gathered behind him made a neighing noise through their noses, which in the language of the country means "yes."

"Very well," said Swain. "We will aid you. Now, slay us plenty of meat, and fetch us meal and drink."

The Spainland folk cried out very cheerfully that all they possessed was at the command of the Mikligard-farers, and indeed, they produced such a store of food as satisfied every one of the Northmen and sufficed to fill the empty cargo space in the long-ships. Not only was there meal and meat, but fruit of divers kinds, some of it strange to the Northmen, and wine, both in barrels and in skins.

And the Spainland folk, themselves, mixed freely among their visitors and told terrible tales of the cruelties they suffered at the hands of the heathen, so that Erling waxed very wroth and was all for going against the castle that moment. But Swain advised that before they did anything they should repair the damage to their ships and rest their men in order that they might be sure to make the mightiest possible effort, and in the event of defeat be certain of a chance of escape.

THEY passed several days in the ordering of their ships and their weapons and armor, and during this time Swain and the other chiefs went frequently to a high place from which they might secure a view of the castle upon an adjacent height. It was a fair, strong borg, with curtain-walls and towers of stone, but lacking a ditch at the foot of the walls. Within it was a strong garrison, and the sunlight flashed upon goodly mail behind its battlements. From the Christian folk Swain learned that it likewise possessed a cistern of fresh water and a quantity of food to feed its people an entire year.

"Here is no wooden-roofed skalli to be burned in a night," he said to Erling and Eindridi. "We can not form the shield-wall and march over it or ring it in the while we cast torches into the thatch. This is a tougher nut than I ever thought to crack."

"Bah," said Eindridi, "We of the Varangians have taken many a stronger in Serkland. All that is required is ladders and a sufficiency of courage."

"*Humph*," commented Swain. "And how shall we replace the men slain in the assault, for you can not rear ladders against a stark wall without man-scathe?"

"It can be done," asserted Eindridi. "If we had the emperor's engineers, now, they would batter the walls with the proper engines and pick at their base from beneath a timber shelter, after the stonecasting engines had jarred the courses loose."

Swain regarded the Varangian with a severe eye.

"Teach us how to construct these engines," he said. "We will use them as well as any Greeks."

"No, no, I have not the knowledge," cried Eindridi. "I am a soldier."

"*Humph*," growled Swain. "Well, a promise we have made, and a promise we must keep. But it seems to me it shall cost us dear. What can you suggest, Erling?"

The young lenderman had been staring at the walls of the castle throughout the debate between Swain and Eindridi.

"It may be that my thought is a foolish one," he answered. "It was put in my mind by what Swain said of burning a skalli. That is the way we always seek to destroy a trapped enemy in the North, and I do not suppose there is a better way, if you can make fire serve your purpose."

"But there is no thatch to burn," objected Swain impatiently; "and the walls are of stone, not timber."

"Yes, Swain," rejoined Erling; "but fire will destroy a stone wall no less surely than a wooden one. The lime between the stones will be destroyed by a great heat, and my plan is that we should kindle a great fire against a stretch of the wall and keep it going until the wall tumbles down."

Swain beat his anvil of a fist upon his comrade's back.

"By Thor, there is a man with a brain!" he swore. "Hark to him, Eindridi. Young as he is, he saw further than you or I."

Eindridi bit his lip.

"That is yet to be seen," he replied, somewhat vexed. "I never heard that you were a forelooker, Swain."

"No, but I can use another man's wit when I know it to be keener than mine," replied Swain. "Come! We must put these Spainland folk to work for us."

He summoned the old chief of the villagers, explained his plan and bade the native Christians go into the wood and cut a vast number of faggots. Then he posted the Northmen within arrow-shot of the castle wall, with spear-casters even nearer, and they maintained such a volley of missiles that the heathen on the wall scarce dared show their heads, and as fast as the faggots were ready they were piled in a vast heap against it. When night came Swain, himself, thrust a torch into the mass and set it alight, but he would not permit the villagers to desist from their work.

"It takes much wood to overthrow a stone wall," he said. "And if we do the sword-work you shall at least level a path for us to climb over."

He kept the fire burning for three days, and so fiercely did it rage after the first day that the smoke protected the besiegers and the heat became so intense that when fresh fuel had to be placed on the flames they pushed the faggots forward with long poles. Toward dark of the third day the wall fell with a crash that rocked the ground. Eindridi would have charged at once, but Swain caught him by the shoulder and dragged him back.

"Would you burn your feet?" demanded the Orkneyman. "Those stones are hotter than the ploughshares Harald Gillichrist walked on to prove himself rightful king—and here is no crown at stake. We will have the village folk pour water on the breach."

And so all through the night Swain had the villagers trotting back and forth between the river and the castle with jugs of water which were emptied on the stones of the breach under cover of a remorseless hail of arrows from the bows of the Northmen. But he was not content with that, and shortly before the dawn he bade them bring a fresh supply of faggots, and these he lighted at a distance from the walls, yet so that the smoke from them blew in a dense cloud over the castle.

"There," he said. "The heathen will not be able to see us, but they will expect us to climb the breach, and in that we shall, perhaps, disappoint them."

"What?" exclaimed Erling, much surprized.

"After this delay and the trouble we have gone to!" shouted Eindridi. "Will you hold off, longer, Swain? After all, I am chief, as you yourself have said."

"Yes, you are chief," admitted Swain, and said no more.

"Well, what is in your mind?" demanded Eindridi after the silence became uncomfortable.

"You are chief," said Swain. "It is for you to plan."

"No, no, Swain," said Erling. "You must not stand aside. It is to Eindridi's credit that he is always willing to accept your advice."

"Is he?" returned Swain grimly.

"I have welcomed all that you have said," answered Eindridi hotly. "No man can say the contrary."

"You have quarreled like a woman whenever I did not flatter your vanity," ripped Swain. "And I am tired of it."

Eindridi's sword flashed from its sheath but again Erling got himself between the two of them.

"It is beyond bearing that two of us three should fall out in a private quarrel when our expedition is upon the verge of success," he cried. "Eindridi is chief, as Swain has said, but that is no reason why he should not take advice from any man. Also, I think that Swain should curb his tongue where we, his comrades, are concerned."

Swain grinned through his beard.

"You have the courtier's way of dodging a bared point, Erling," he said. "You should travel a long way. But I was not aware that I had miscalled you."

"You have not. It was——"

"Eindridi. Yes, I can not bear that a man should be stupid. Eindridi has courage, I know; but he is stupid and quarrelsome."

"I am no talker," choked Eindridi. "But I make my words good."

Swain rounded suddenly upon him.

"If you would make your words good, Eindridi," snapped the Orkneyman, "take your company to the opposite wall of the castle and climb over under cover of the smoke while we assail the breach."

Eindridi gaped at him.

"Do you not understand?" rejoined Swain impatiently. "The heathen will be expecting us to attack here, and we will accommodate them, in order that you may come upon them in the rear, with no more effort than the climbing of a wall."

"Oh, very well," answered the Varangian gruffly. "But there will be more slaying here, and I am no man to have it said——"

Swain turned on his heel.

"To me, Swain's men," he shouted. And to Eindridi he said:

"So be it. I will go over the wall. I care not what any man says of me. Swain's way is Swain's way."

Yet he left a hundred of his people with Eindridi and Erling because at the breach must be the heaviest shock of the assault. With the remainder he circled the castle stealthily, and they reared a rude platform of tree-trunks and timbers, and on this the viking-farers climbed, the one man upon the shoulders of the next, and so a few won to the wall's top and hauled up their comrades by ship's-ropes. None of the heathen perceived them, for, as Swain had surmised, the castle's garrison were all guarding the breach, whence came a shouting and weapon-clashing that dinned like thunder from the black heart of the smoke-clouds.

Yet above the shouting rose now the voice of Eindridi, singing as he hewed with his sword:

"Glad was I when Verbon's Lady
Listened to my love tale's telling;
Hopelessly was I led captive
By a blackmaned Valland maiden.
Still I love the noble lady.
In her honor feast, ye eagles,
As the stone and lime we heated
Now before me fall asunder.

And Armod, by Swain's side, carried on the lay:

When in Springtime, o'er the waters
Ye fare homeward to the Northland,
Tell the lady whom I favor—
Ermingard the beauteous maiden—
That, beneath the heathens' ramparts,
There was none who stepped more boldly
Than her lover, Armod Skaldi.

"*Humph*," growled Swain to Erik. "Is this a skalds' fray? Trim your shields, lads. Points low!"

Their line swept forward across the castle courtyard and smashed into the rear of the defenders, who were massed behind and on both sides of the breach, shooting and slashing down at Eindridi and Erling and their folk. Caught between the two bodies of Northmen, the heathen turned uncertainly, now forward, now back. But they were unable to stand before the deadly pressure of the opposing shield-walls, and those who could fled to right or left along the walls, either leaping down into the open country or fleeing through the castle gateway. All these were taken care of by the villagers, who slew them with knives or even sticks and stones as they ran. Of twelvescore men in the castle not one escaped, for the Northmen made a clean sweep of those who resisted to the last in the breach. It was of this business that Oddi the Little afterward composed his "Red Saga" which was sung from the Iceland skallis to the Lettish marches beyond Sweden:

Red the sunrise through the smoke-cloud;
Red the sword-blades in the flames' glow;
Red the spurting blood of heroes;
Red the stones whereon it glistened;
Red the gold our valor gained us
When we stormed the heathen's castle.

They won great store of precious things, so that all men were happy, and Eindridi and Swain buried their quarrel, and no more bitterness was felt over the trick Swain had played to fetch them forth of Verbon. Only Armod would sit upon the prow of *Deathbringer* as they fared southward by Spainland in the twilight, and when Swain would bid Oddi to summon the tall skald aft for a draught of wine or a game with the knuckle-bones the little man would say:

"No, no, Swain, let be. Armod is not as Eindridi. He does not forget a fair maid in a single fight nor bury her memory beneath a ship-load of plunder."

"I'll carry him back to her if he must mope out the days," barked Swain. "He is a good man of his hands, but if he will——"

"You do not understand," replied Oddi, grinning. "Armod is not unhappy. The trick of being a skald, Swain, is to find happiness in sorrow and regrets. Let him be. He will make a brave lay out of his reflections."

"It is a pity that a warrior must also be a fool," said Swain.

But it was observed that he honored Armod above others, and where Erik sat at his right hand the tall skald had always a place at his left. So they sailed on through Njorfasund* and into the Inner Sea.

CHAPTER VII

OF THE ISLET IN THE FOG, AND OF HOW THE MIKLIGARD-FARERS FOUGHT THE DROMOND

EASTWARD fared they now, by oar-pull and sail-push, farther and ever farther; but no longer were they frozen by icy winds. Instead there blew upon them by times from the south a wind that might have come all fiery from the brazen throat of a gigantic furnace—"demon's breath" Oddi called it. Yet more frequently the weather was only warm or moderately hot, and the seas were smooth compared to those they were accustomed to wrestling in the Northern Ocean. Oddi made a lay of it:

Now our good ship, land forsaking,
Laves her prow in limpid waters.
By a west wind, breathing softly,
We are wafted ever onward,
As we push the yards out farther;
Though we have to tie the canvas
Tighter than we had expected
To the middle of the sailyard,
South off Njorfi we are heading.

For a period of days they made good progress. Then a fog shut down upon them, and through this they pulled cautiously, keeping close together lest they lose one another; and at night, when the world became a black and pearl-gray swirl of oozing vapor, they lashed the long-ships two-and-two and passed hawsers betwixt the couples, fore and aft. So they continued for two days and three nights.

On the third day the fog diminished to a degree which permitted them to secure an occasional view around them, and in the midst of one such break, when a vagrant puff of wind lifted up the enveloping curtain, they saw a great island, crowned by enormous mountains, which Eindridi told them was Sardinia.

Later in the day the fog lifted again, and Erik called out from the poop of *Deathbringer*—

"Ho, there is a second island to starboard of us, albeit no more than a holm."

Swain followed his pointing arm, and descried a hulking mass that lifted athwart the veil of the mist. They shouted the news to the other ships, and Eindridi rowed up in *Seamaiden* to have a look at it. But he laughed in derision as Erik indicated it to him.

"That is no holm," he said. "Although I will admit it is as big as many a holm in Bjorgvin harbor."

"What is it?" challenged Swain.

"It is a dromond, a great ship such as the Greeks and the heathen of these parts build to trade and make war in. I have told you of them before. They have no oars, but carry three masts for sails and more men, perhaps, than on all our six ships. See! They have beheld us, and they try to steal away."

He pointed in his turn, and even as he said, so it was. The dromond, by dressing her sails, was able to take advantage of another of those vagrant wind-puffs and slipped off into the fog.

"*Humph*," growled Swain across the narrow gap of water betwixt his ship and Eindridi's. "It would appear that they are afraid of us."

"They do not know how many we are," returned Eindridi. "But be sure you never ventured against so difficult an enemy as she might be, Swain. So high in the water is she that we might not reach her bulwarks, but her people could sweep our decks at will and pour down on us boiling oil and flaming pitch and brimstone."

Erling had rowed up beside them now, and he called to Eindridi:

"Can you be sure if she is Christian or heathen?"

---

*Straits of Gibraltar.

"Only a heathen dromond would ply these seas," replied the Varangian.

"Would she be a rich prize?" asked Swain.

"She would if she could be taken," answered Eindridi, "but it is my thought that few of us would be alive to enjoy her, supposing that we were successful, which I doubt."

"You are not in favor of the venture, I perceive," remarked Swain. "Of course, you are the leader, Eindridi, and Erling and I must be governed by you. Yet I think we shall lose an opportunity to gain much honor, and it may be rich booty to add to that we took in Spainland, if we pass by this dromond."

"I am as hot for a fight as any man," cried Eindridi, "but I remind you that you, yourself, Swain, have held out against ventures which would lose us more men than we could afford to risk."

"That is true," admitted Swain, "and if there seems to be no reasonable chance of success I shall be willing to continue our voyage. I am asking, now, if you and Erling have any ideas which might help us to win the dromond?"

"There are six of us," answered Eindridi testily. "We can put three long-ships on either beam of her and swarm her sides as best we may."

"And as you have said, be slain or burned for our pains," rejoined Swain. "We must do better than that."

"I know less of such matters than either of you," said Erling, "but it seems to me that because the dromond is so much higher than our ships the missiles she discharges at us will often be wasted. Let us, at least, have an attempt to carry her. If it is too much for us, why, then we can draw off."

"You speak with sense," said Swain. "It is true that we shall have an advantage by reason of our low free-boards. Let us send three ships to lie around the dromond and overwhelm her deck with arrows. Then it will go hard if we can not discover some way to gain an entrance to her from our other three ships."

Eindridi shrugged his shoulders.

"I will do whatever you and Erling desire," he replied. "I have warned you of the danger in this venture, and if you still wish to attempt it you can count upon my support. But it is more likely to end in disaster than in victory."

"That is to be seen," said Swain.

IT WAS arranged that the three chiefs' ships should close in upon the dromond and attempt to board her, while the other three craft, in accordance with Swain's plan, should lie off within easy arrow-flight and assail the enemy with an unceasing stream of missiles. The fog was lightening all this time, and as they pulled away southeast they came presently upon the dromond again, barely crawling through the water before the fitful breeze. And the nearer they came to her the more they marveled at her size.

"Never thought I to see the like," exclaimed Erik.

"She is a whole town by herself," said Armod.

"Olaf the Holy's *Long Serpent* would have been a fit landing-boat for her," said Oddi.

"Yet shall we take her," replied Swain to all of them. "Hark to the outcries of her people."

And truly, the heathen folk on the dromond made a clamor that carried miles across the water, with beating of cymbals and braying of horns and shouting and threatening. Her decks were crowded with men, and of her crew many were black people, large as the Northmen in stature, with scanty white cloths wrapped around their bodies, and long, curved swords in their hands. Nor did she lack for armored men, of whom there were hundreds, small, lean people, with dark, bearded faces, who waved spears and swords; and from her poop and forecastle and the tops of her masts archers shot fast and true, although their bows had not the strength of the Northern elmwood. And a huge machine on her forecastle brandished a long arm suddenly high in air and jerked a stone into the water alongside of *Deathbringer*. Had it struck the dragon it must have ripped the bottom out of her.

"Close in," shouted Swain. "We can not risk that stone-caster again. Shoot at her, archers. Keep her men clear of the engine."

The water boiled under the oars of the three chiefs' ships, and the other three ships started to row around the dromond in a circle, maintaining a constant flood of arrows which made it perilous for the heathen to raise an arm above the bulwarks and prevented them from working the stone-caster with any success. And taking advantage of this opportunity, Swain brought *Deathbringer* alongside the enemy's larboard bow as Erling rounded in against the starboard side of the great prow.

Eindridi steered *Seamaiden* under the dromond's waist, where her bulwarks were lowest, and built a foundation of casks and rowing-benches on his poop in an effort to give his folk an opportunity to board; but they could not come within finger-clutch of the towering bulwarks, and the heathen, though fearful to show themselves to the archers in the encircling long-ships, were able to drop ballast-stones and spears and buckets of boiling oil or burning pitch and brimstone into the midst of their assailants. Eindridi suffered sore man-scathe until Leif Anakol's son stationed his ship opposite to *Seamaiden* and swept the bulwarks above the gilded dragon with his fire.

In the meantime Swain had made a futile attempt to throw a boarding-party on to the dromond from the yard-arm of his mast, and he stood staring up at the flat, incurving wall of solid timbers against which *Deathbringer* rocked and rattled as the waves rolled the two craft together. Some of his men were exchanging spears with enemies on the dromond's forecastle, and others were pecking idly at her sides with their weapons or endeavoring to swing themselves on board by means of a rope rigged from the yard-arm.

"*Humph*," grunted Swain, "it is plain that we can not climb over the enemy, since our mast scarcely reaches as high as her bulwarks. But perhaps we can hew into her."

Erik stretched out his shield automatically and caught an arrow which had been aimed at his chief.

"How, Swain?" he asked.

"We will cut our way into her," replied Swain. "You are a good axman, Erik. Muster all the ax-wielders you can find and set them to work at one spot in the dromond's hull."

Erik did as he was bidden, and soon he had half a dozen men chopping beside him. Erling heard the thudding of the axes, and he called from the forecastle of his ship to know what Swain was doing, and when Swain told him, he did a deed which went far to make the plan successful.

Where Swain's men were chopping into the dromond's hull the timbers and planks were very thick, because it was close to the water-line, where the full shock of the waves was felt in a heavy sea. Therefore they made slow progress. But Erling perceived that it was possible for him to climb from his own forecastle to the stock of a huge anchor of iron which hung over the dromond's prow, and standing upon this anchor-stock, he was able to hew at a part of the hull where the sheathing was half as thick as in the spot Erik and his people were attacking. Moreover, Erling lifted up beside him two other men—so large was the anchor that three men could stand side by side on the stock of it and have room to wield their axes—and with them to aid him, he succeeded in chopping a hole into an upper deck before Erik's party had cut through to the lowest deck.

So busy were the heathen on the highest deck, withstanding the repeated attempts of Eindridi's men to clamber into the dromond's waist, that they paid no attention to the attacks by Erling and Erik, and the first they knew of Swain's device was when Erling led his crew into the middle deck and commenced to fight his way up through the dromond's hull.

That was a bloody business. Erling was outnumbered a score of times, for his men could come after him only one by one; and in the beginning of the fray, in disposing of two enemies at once, he was obliged to take a sword-stroke upon his neck, close by his shoulder, where the mail of his harness only partially protected him. It was this wound which won him the nickname he was known by all the rest of his life, as shall be told in its proper place.

It must have gone hard with Erling had he been unsupported by more than his own crew, but at the moment he was bending all his strength to hold the footing he had won Erik and Swain and their folk burst into the dromond's lowest deck, and taking advantage of the absorption of the heathen in the struggle with Erling, succeeded in gaining the topmost deck, practically unopposed. This, in turn, was the signal for Eindridi to lead his crew in a successful assault of the bulwarks, and the three other long-ships abandoned their long-range arrow-flights and dashed in to send their men swarming up the ropes which the Northmen aboard the dromond cast over to them.

Yet the heathen were in no ways dismayed by the sudden reversal of fortune, and they assailed the Northmen with a ferocity which took no account of death. The black men, especially, would cast their swords in a foeman's face, spring upon him with bare hands and be content if they might twine their legs around him and leap with him into the sea.

For a while the fighting raged without order or method, for the Northmen thought only of getting on the dromond's decks, and the heathen, on their part, were concerned with slaying their enemies as rapidly as they could. But after a sufficient number of the Christians had come aboard they formed in two parties, one at the forward end of the dromond and the second aft, and advanced slowly along the deck, until the few heathen who remained alive were caught fairly betwixt the shield-walls and threw down their weapons and besought quarter.

Eindridi counseled that they should spare these men, because they were all strong, lusty fellows, and could be sold as slaves for a fair price in Mikligard. After the prisoners had been secured, the three chiefs went through the prize from end to end and divided up the booty, and so innumerable were the riches in cabins and holds that there was not space in the six long-ships to hold them. Cloths and weaponsw hich were worth their weight in silver merks in Norway were cast aside as not worthy of attention, and it came about that in order to accommodate some of their new-won trophies it was necessary for the Northmen to throw overboard certain of the spoil they they had seized in the Spainland castle.

It was the richest prize ever taken by Orkney viking-farers, and men talked of it for long years afterward.

When the loot had all been discovered and the wounded attended to the warriors procured food from the dromond's cooking-fires and fetched ale aboard from the long-ships, and then they sat about the bloody decks and discussed the deeds which had been performed and the men who had earned the most merit. And as is usual at such times the most dissension turned upon the question—who was first to board the dromond? So several men of his own and Erling's ships appealed to Swain to settle the point.

Swain laughed, pointing to Erling beside him. The young lenderman had his wound bandaged, so that his head was held over on one side and strapped in that position; and because of the way the muscles healed his head always remained in this position so long as he lived.

"It was Erling Skakki—'Wry-necked'—here," said Swain. "We all came after him."

And that was how Erling came by the name which he bore when he was the most famous man in Norway, and a maker of kings, as well as a friend to them. Oddi drummed on his shield when Swain had spoken, and sang a lay in celebration of the new name, and as he sang the others kept time by beating on their shields:

Erling Skakki was the man, who
First, with energy and valor,
Scaled the black sides of the dromond;
Thanks to him we have rich booty;
We have overcome the heathen;
We have made a feast for ravens;
Round us lie the sable corpses.

When they had all rested sufficiently Eindridi remarked that they must now decide what they were to do with the dromond.

"If we could carry it to Mikligard with us we might sell it for a goodly sum," he said; "but I do not know how to handle it, and I think that Swain and the rest of you are in equally bad case."

"That is true," agreed Swain. "I have grown up in a long-ship, and I am too old to learn how to manage a hulk of a ship with as many sails as we have in our whole fleet. Moreover, such a ship must require a large crew, and we have lost several score men by reason of the operations we have undertaken, and it would not be a wise thing to leave our long-ships undermanned."

"You and Eindridi have stated the case fairly," said Erling. "It is plain that we must burn our prize so that the heathen can not recover it. Yet perhaps we can turn the sacrifice to honorable account by employing it as a means to provide suitable burial for our dead. We can not place them in consecrated ground, so let us lay them on the dromond's deck, with their slain enemies around them, as our folk used to do in the old times."

"There would be a howl from the priests did they hear of it," remarked Eindridi; "but I would rather end so in the clean fire than moulder in the ground."

"What the priests say is of no concern to us," said Swain. "Erling's plan means that we shall give brave men hough burial at sea, and that is what any brave man would have wished."

So first they stacked up all the dead heathen—thirty-five score of them, no less—in a great heap upon the dromond's deck, and then they laid their own dead atop of the heap of slain, each man with his sword in his hand and his shield over him, and they kindled fires in different parts of the big hull and pushed off from it. As they sailed on into the east upon their mission, the dromond filled away and came after them for a ways, the flames bursting out of her sides and running up and down her yards and masts; but presently the wind died and the death-ship came-to, and they left her there, alone in the sea. The last they saw of her as they passed over the horizon was a pillar of flame that climbed steadily toward the sky.

CHAPTER VIII

OF THE MIGHTY CITY OF MIKLIGARD, AND OF THE TIDINGS WHICH CAME TO EINDRIDI UNGI AT THE PALACE GATE

AFTER the burning of the dromond the Mikligard-farers held to an eastward course so far as the island of Crete, and here they tarried to purchase provisions from the Christian folk who dwelt in that land. From Crete they trended northward, passing through a myriad islands, large and small, until they came at the end of Summer to the narrow waters that lead to Mikligard. And here again they tarried at a place called Aegisness*, putting their ships to rights, in order that they might make a brave showing before the Emperor Manuel.

When all had been done that it was possible to do to present an honorable appearance, they thrust out their oars and rowed up to Mikligard, passing first through a strait no wider than a river, then through a sea that the Greeks call Marmora and at last into a second strait whereon is built the city. And all those who had never yet seen it marveled at the greatness of it, and the size and richness, as the miles and miles of houses, churches and palaces spread out before them.

Swain, who was seldom known to express surprize, chewed at his beard for the entire passage of the city, staring with hungry eyes at the stone walls that protected it, even upon its sea-face, the multitudes of people who crowded the high places to watch the Northmen's ships and the fair buildings of stone, many with roofs of gold or bronze.

"What power might a man win with this if he knew how to use it!" he exclaimed.

Erik of Iceland blinked his puckered eyes in wistful appraisal.

"We should need the most of a year to loot it—thoroughly—Swain," he said.

"Yes," said Oddi, "and all the weapon-bearers of the Northlands to do it."

But Armod shook his head at them.

"Why would you loot what is perfect?" he cried. "It has taken many men many lives to build this city and make it beautiful."

"*Humph*," growled Swain. "What use is beauty?"

"Save in a lay," objected Oddi quickly.

"In aught save a woman," grunted Erik, "it is a poor investment; and the best women I have known have not always been the fairest."

"Beauty is a snare to catch a man's eye," said Swain.

"Not so," said Armod. "Look at those great buildings! See the statue of the man on the horse—St. Magnus, but it must be as large as this vessel! And there is a woman in stone! And a boy running! It makes my heart leap in me as though I had just slain a stout enemy. That is no snare, Swain."

"It has taken your mind from the errand which fetches us here," rasped Swain, "which is proof enough for me that beauty is a snare."

"And now I really understand why Eindridi warned us that it would not be so easy to come at Olvir Rosta in Mikligard," said Erik. "How long would it take for us to search every house there?"

"You are a fool, Erik," retorted Swain. "Olvir is a well-known man. He can not move about without his presence being noted. Moreover, as Eindridi has told us, he should be in attendance upon the emperor, who will not be difficult to find."

"But how if the emperor stands his friend?" asked Oddi.

Swain frowned.

"That is a river I will swim when I come to it. Eindridi says that this emperor is a brave man of his hands, who joys to meet a worthy opponent, spear to spear. Such a man will not stand in the way of my lawful vengeance."

"What is lawful in the Orkneyar may not be lawful in Mikligard, Swain," Armod reminded him.

"I will find a way to reach Olvir," Swain answered confidently. "If every man of you dies, and I with you."

---

* Promontory of Sigeum at the mouth of the Dardanelles.

"*Hah!* Well spoken!" applauded Oddi. "We will show these Greeks what Northern blades can do."

"They know already," remarked Erik, pointing inshore.

Eindridi, in *Seamaiden*, had steered close to the sea-walls, and the course fetched the long-ships beneath a range of battlements shutting in a group of buildings that glistened with marble, alabaster and onyx; and on these battlements stood lines of tall, fair-haired men, who leaned upon huge axes, peering stolidly at the little craft that bobbed past their aerie.

"The Varangians!" exclaimed Armod.

"Then that is the emperor's palace," cried Oddi. "I remember Eindridi described it as sitting by itself, almost as a separate city."

"Ah, what looting!" sighed Erik. "Every one of those lads is dressed as richly as Eindridi, himself. He did not lie when he told us of the emperor's magnificence."

"I pray, for his sake, he did not lie in what he told me of my enemy," answered Swain. "Ho, there are the emperor's ships!"

They had passed several harbors, indenting the line of the sea-walls, and now they came to a considerable basin, fortified by curving jetties, crowned in turn by ramparts and terminating in massive, squat towers which seemed to be built within the sea. Inside the protecting arms of the jetties lay tier on tier of ships such as the Northmen had never seen. Plainly, they were propelled by oars. The eye of any sailor among them could discern as much from the lean, raking lines of the hulls. Moreover, there were the oars trailing along the sides of some which were manned and ready for duty. But the oddity about them was their high shear out of the water—they had three times and more the free-board of Swain's *Deathbringer*—and the fact that their oars were arranged in three banks, one above the other.

"These dragons have many legs to crawl upon!" exclaimed Erik.

"They are what Eindridi calls triremes," explained Swain.

"Short work they would make of us if they ever drove beak into our waist," said Oddi.

"If they did," replied Swain. "We could turn twice while they were swinging their hulks around."

But Armod diverted their attention. They had shot by the harbor of the triremes, and now they rounded a wooded promontory and opened a prospect more wonderful than any they had yet beheld.

"Look! Look!" called the tall skald. "It is the Siavidarsund.* There is the chain upon its wooden floats, resting against that white tower. Who would have thought there were so many ships in the world?"

BEFORE the Northmen extended a wide bay or bight in the land, on either lip of the entrance was a heavy fortification of stone, and resting against the base of the left-hand one was a ponderous boom of timber upon which was carried a steel chain. A hook projecting from a stone platform under the right-hand fortress indicated the purpose of the contrivance. Towed across the mouth of the harbor and moored in position there, the boom sealed it against all egress or ingress.

The harbor, itself, was jammed with a wealth of shipping, for here was the center of the world's commerce, and the least of these stately merchant vessels was as big as *Deathbringer* or *Seamaiden*, while ther were many as big as the dromond they had carried in the fog, and besides, innumerable busses and pamphyleans, as the Greeks called them, huissiers, or transports, and other craft. The galleys were as thick as landing-boats in Bjorgvin harbor. And all along the shores were wharves and warehouses and shipyards, a buzzing, bustling world by itself, outside the continuing line of the city's walls, which turned the elbow of the promontory and marched on up the left-hand margin of the bight.

As the Northmen wore around and headed into the harbor, following Eindridi's lead, a light, twelve-oared galley sped out from a gate in the city's walls, but a word from Eindridi, standing proudly in his glistening mail upon the poop of *Seamaiden*, won a respectful bow from the officers in the galley's stern and she leaped in front of the long-ships, guiding them to a mooring by a wooden pier that projected from the narrow bit of built-over land that

---

*The Sound with the seawood, *i. e.* the boom across the entrance—Norse name for Golden Horn.

extended between the margin of the harbor and the city's walls. It was a region of dingy, toppling warehouses, and cheap brothels and taverns, interspersed with rope-walks, smithies, carpentry shops, weaving establishments and slave-barracks, a tenuous, straggling belt of prosperity and sin upon which the great city, secure within its bands of virgin walls, glutted and besotted itself for century after century.

But of this the Northmen recked little. They were concerned with the visible aspects of their surroundings—the strange dress of the people, the high-pitched, nervous voices of the crew of the escort galley that had piloted them to their berth, the bales of goods that cluttered the wharf against which they came to rest, the tongueless slaves who clucked with their lips as they caught the mooring-ropes and drew the long-ships out of the channel, and most of all, the endless, smoking might of the gigantic city that staggered away across hills and valleys beyond the bulwark of the walls, as far as they could see, snarling, crying, laughing, shouting, talking with a million tongues.

Wild children of a wild, hard land, their innate barbarism always pricking through its scanty covering of new-learned Christianity, they were overawed, despite their savage independence. Here was a human effort infinitely grander and more diversified than anything they had conceived of, transcending their experience even as the buildings of the Greeks dwarfed the rude, thatched skallis of their scattered villages. Their first reaction was combative; they felt the need to assert themselves.

Swain, leaping to the wharf from *Deathbringer's* bulwark, strode to meet Eindridi, with a sullen frown upon his face.

"What now?" he demanded. "Are the Greeks friendly?"

"Why not?" returned Eindridi, surprized. "They would never have suffered us to enter otherwise."

"They may be treacherous."

Eindridi laughed.

"That they are, Swain, but in this case you need have no fear. I am too well known to them."

"If Olvir Rosta is here——"

"He knows nothing of you. It is I who may expect treachery from him—if what you say of him be true."

"It is true," responded Swain sourly. "You will agree with me before very long."

One of the officers of the harbor watch crossed the wharf to where the chiefs stood and addressed Eindridi in Greek, and Swain turned to Erling, who had climbed up from *Farseeker's* deck.

"I like it not," he gloomed. "Here we are in Eindridi's hands, and he is in the Greeks'."

"I see no cause for concern," answered Erling. "These people seem courteous."

"Yes, but we do not know their speech. How can we tell what they plan or devise?"

"Eindridi——"

"Eindridi!" mocked Swain. "We have all witnessed how foolish he can be. He is always willing to listen to whoever will tell him how famous he is and give ear to his preening tales. I am uneasy as long as I lean upon his judgment."

"Yet you have been able to manage him without difficulty during our voyage," said Erling.

"I can manage him," retorted Swain, "but I must have my wits free to grapple with Olvir, who is as skilful a foe— But Eindridi is leaving the Greek. Look how he swells out his chest and swaggers in his walk! Was there ever such a vain fool! And we must depend on him for the lives of more than five hundred men!"

Eindridi rejoined them with a patronizing smile.

"All is well," he said. "Our coming was signaled up the coast, and the emperor awaits us. He suspected I should be returning at this time. We are to go to the palace."

"All of us?" questioned Swain.

"All."

"And we do not give up our arms?"

"You go with *me*," answered Eindridi proudly.

"*Humph*," growled Swain, "and does that mean that we are assured against guile?"

"I am the grand acolyte of the emperor," boasted Eindridi; "my place is at his right hand. My friends are his friends."

"*Humph*," growled Swain again. "That is to be seen. I examine my next step in any town where Olvir Rosta lurks."

"You are safe with me," protested Eindridi. "And as to Olvir, he is——"

"I knew him before you did," interrupted Swain. "But talking carries us nowhere. Let us go to the emperor."

The Northmen were mustered out of their ships, save for a handful of ship-guards selected from those who were recovering from wounds received in the fight with the dromond, and arrayed in ranks upon the wharf. And Swain's heart swelled in his breast as he took his place with Erling and Eindridi and glanced back over those giant files, looming above the men of the harbor-watch who had boarded the pier to bar the invasion of the common folk.

A higher officer appeared as they commenced to move into the tangle of streets which intervened betwixt the water and the walls, and he and his mounted escort led the way, the hoofs of the horses rattling on the cobbles and the footfalls of the Northmen mingling with the clank and clatter of mail. The Greeks stood against the house-walls to see the column pass, leaned from windows and peered from roofs, and the jabbering of their nasal voices sometimes drowned the martial noises of the marching men.

They passed through a gate in the harbor wall, and entered a street a trifle wider than that which they had first traversed. The buildings around them were still such as were to be expected in a center of slums and trade, but gradually the character of the thoroughfare changed for the better. Wooden houses gave way to stone structures. And the bystanders were no longer mechanics, watermen, mariners, dock-laborers and slaves, but shopkeepers and small merchants. Presently they came to an open space, stone-paved, surrounded by arcades, a fountain playing in the center. Atop of the arcades were gardens and footwalks, with marble statues at frequent intervals, and Armod exclaimed anew at the beauty around him.

"Certainly these folk know how to live," he said.

"You have seen none of the finest things in the city," replied Eindridi. "We are only just leaving the poorer quarters."

"I should not mind being a poor man in this city," said Oddi.

"We must make King Ingi join forces with King Eystein, and fetch a proper host here," declared Erik. "The loot would make the Northland rich. We should all be Jarls."

Eindridi smiled tolerantly.

"You are not the first to have the idea," he said. "Many folk have laid siege to Mikligard, the Saracens once for three years on end, but nobody could take it."

Armod seized the Varangian's arm.

"See," he clamored. "What is that vast building ahead, with the golden roof that floats in the air?"

"That is the Great Church," answered Eindridi. "St. Sophia is patron to it, and men say it is the fairest and mightiest building in the world."

"I would our Norse priests might see it," said Oddi. "They would be for building all our churches over again. By the Hammer of Thor! The blessed angels can step easily from the sky to its roof."

"The priests have too much, as it is," growled Swain. "Let be, Oddi. In the Orkneys if a man has had a successful cruise he must pay toll to Bishop William that they may build so many more courses on the minster at Kirkiuvag."

"But who would not give all he had to such a building?" cried Armod. "It is like a lay that a man has poured his whole heart into. I tingle when I look at it. Now I understand why the Lord Christ was ready to let His enemies slay Him on the Cross, for well I know I would gladly die for the Spirit that is in that church."

"You will die when your day comes," returned Swain. "As for our Lord Christ, I say naught against Him, seeing that He succeeded very well in what He set out to do—although the old gods are more to my liking, if the priests would but let me alone—but I am sure that I would not have allowed my enemies to do me to death, without rallying my friends and lopping a few limbs from the rascals that beset me."

"There is another splendid building, over against the great church," said Erling. "What may it be, Eindridi?"

"That is what the Greeks call the Senate, which is the Thing meeting of their wise men."

"And that enormous wall beyond, which bristles with statues?" cried Armod.

"That is the hippodrome, in which they have races in four-horsed chariots and other sports."

"Do they fight there?" asked Swain with sudden interest.

"I have heard men say that in the old days they did such things. Nowadays the priests would not permit it, although the emperor and his men ride at each other with blunted lances across the sandy floor."

There was so much to see now that the Northmen marched with their heads spinning from side to side. They tramped through another of the vast, colonnaded open spaces, far grander than the first they had seen, turned to the left, leaving the Great Church and the Senate behind them on their right hand, and passed an immense flat-roofed building, its sculptured font blank and windowless.

"That will be a prison, Eindridi," said Oddi confidently.

"No, it is a bath," replied the Varangian.

"A bath!" jeered Oddi. "Who would need to bathe in a space two ship's lengths from end to end!"

"Many folk," retorted Eindridi. "And very pleasant it is if you have been exercising with your men to go in and be rubbed by the slaves and swim in the cool water."

"*Humph*," growled Swain. "It may do for women, but not for me. There is water enough in the sea for my needs. But what have we before us? It must be the palace."

Across their path was reared a broad arch in a battlemented wall that ran on interminably in either direction. The front and top of the arch were covered with statues of men fighting and marching in triumphal procession, and mingled between the sculptured groups were pictures set in tiny bits of colored stone, most notable of all a representation of the Christ immediately above the gateway in the center. Around this gate lounged a group of guards in gilded and silvered mail, who turned with one accord to stare at the oncoming column of the Northmen.

And the Northmen stared back with equal candor and curiosity.

"They are not all Greeks," said Erling.

"No," replied Eindridi. "Those with the slant eyes are Khazars; they are excellent archers. The bow-legged men are Pharganoi; they are horsemen. The spearmen are Patzinaks. They are all in the emperor's guard, which is called the 'Hetaireia.' "

"But where, then, are the Varangs?" asked Erling.

"You shall see," answered Eindridi proudly. "We Varangs are those who guard the emperor's person. The other guards may hold the gates and the walls of the palace, but the Varangians stand about the emperor, himself, and I, who am grand acolyte, have the right of entrace to him at any time without announcement. You shall see my authority."

Their mounted escort had wheeled aside, motioning for the Northmen to halt as several of the guards on duty under the arch hastened within. Eindridi stepped out of the rank of chiefs, and called a haughty greeting to a Greek officer in an enameled gold cuirass, who stood in the middle of the gateway. The Greek answered him, and Eindridi asked a question, which the Greek again answered briefly. A bewildered look spread across Eindridi's features; his fingers tightened their grip on the shield which hung on his left arm; and he asked a second question, which the Greek answered with a single word that every Northman understood—

"Olvir."

Eindridi returned to his comrades with dragging feet. He started to speak, but the words choked in his throat, and Swain came to his rescue.

"I do not know everything that the Greek told you," said the Orkneyman; "but I understood enough to know that what I foretold has occurred. Olvir Rosta has supplanted you."

"It is the truth," groaned Eindridi. "I demanded entrance, it is my right. But Demetrius replied that I was no longer grand acolyte. The emperor has named Olvir in my place."

"It was bound to happen," rejoined Swain. "And now that it has happened I counsel you to accept it as a fact, and shape your plans accordingly."

Eindridi regarded Swain with undiminished bewilderment.

"How? What can I do? What plans will avail against the emperor's will?"

Swain shrugged his shoulders.

"We will see to that as the opportunity arises. I admit that I was startled a while back when we came into the midst of this maggot's nest of little folk. But if Olvir Rosta could forge ahead through their numbers then I know that I can. The one point is this, Eindridi: Hitherto we have held you for leader. Now I intend to be leader. Will you accept my claim, and be my man?"

Eindridi flushed and drew himself up with a return of his haughty manner.

"Why should I?" he flared. "If you are Swain, I am Eindridi."

"Because," answered Swain, ignoring the second half of his reply, "I will overthrow Olvir and aid you to secure your office again."

"Swain's proposal is fair," advised Erling anxiously. "Accept it, Eindridi."

Eindridi looked from the serried ranks of the Northmen to the little group of gaudily armored guards who stood beneath the splendid gateway.

"I do not see what you can accomplish," he said uncertainly. "Still——"

"I shall accomplish my object with or without you," replied Swain calmly; "but it may be easier for me with your aid, seeing that you speak these people's tongue and know your way about the city."

One of the guards who had disappeared within the palace hurried out again, and called a message to the Greek officer, who, in his turn, barked an order to Eindridi.

"We are to enter," said the Varangian. "I do not think the emperor can be displeased with me, though——"

"Suit yourself," said Swain. "A man's life is his own, but if a friend of mine took my place, which I had entrusted to him——"

Eindridi's features became contorted with passion.

"You have said it, Swain!" he cried. "That Olvir, who had shared my shield, should—no, it is too much. I accept your terms."

"And you will be my man?" insisted Swain.

Eindridi twiddled uneasily at a bolt in his shield.

"Yes," he agreed at last, "I will be your man, I who have——"

"Tell the Greek that we are ready to enter the palace," commanded Swain.

And over his shoulder he called back to the waiting ranks:

"Heads up, Swain's men! Let these Greeks see how the raven-feeders carry themselves before kings."

CHAPTER IX

OF THE GREETING THE EMPEROR MANUEL GAVE TO SWAIN AND HIS FOLK, AND OF THE QUARREL BETWIXT SWAIN AND OLVIR

BEYOND the gate they traversed a gorgeous vista of halls and corridors, gardens and chambers, and everywhere the palace folk crowded forward to stare at the giants from the North—barbarian guards of the Heteireia, as rude and stalwart as Swain's company, for all their silvered mail and embroidered tunics; supercilious Greeks of the Scholarii, or Noble Guards, one glimmer of gold and jewels, even to their sword-hilts and spear-shafts; priests, men of affairs, nobles, Italian merchants, and always, at every turn, tall, plump men, with hairless faces, who walked with a mincing gait and talked in thin, falsetto voices, the eunuchs, who were the curse of Byzantium, no less than of Bagdad, Cairo and Damascus.

The halls and corridors were paved with marble, often inset with pictures laid in tiny bits of colored stones; the walls glittered with these stone pictures—mosaics, Eindridi called them; and costly rugs from the far Eastern countries were scattered at intervals. The ceilings glowed with frescos, and the pillars that upheld the roof were a dazzling perspective of shades and colors, running all the way from jade green and lambent rose to coral-pink, blue, flesh-colored Samian, the dull red of Chios, black from the Propontine shores and ivory yellow of Hellas. Nor was this true of the more stately apartments alone. Everywhere the magnificence was on a similar scale. And the Northmen peered around them with loot-hungry eyes.

At last they issued into a considerable range of gardens, which fell away to the walled shores of the strait on which the city was situated. Here the grass grew softly on lawn and hillside and embanked terrace. Here cedars lifted plumy tips and plane trees grew in squat hedges. White goddesses and nymphs lurked in the greenery, and there was a constant splashing of fountains. Ahead through the trees rose another building still lovelier than those the visitors had seen, a gracious, swelling shape of intricate, convoluted design, with bubbling domes and walls that ignored right angles.

"It is like a monster sea-shell," said Armod as they emerged from the trees and the structure took definite form before them.

"It is called the Hall of the Triple Shell," answered Eindridi. "The Emperor Theophilus built it ages gone. Within it is fairer than without."

They crossed a graveled area, with a fountain of leaping, brazen fish in the center, and marched up to wide, silver doors on whose panels were chiseled representations of weird, semihuman beings. And in front of these doors stood fair-haired, bearded men, who carried axes and the big, kite-shaped shields of the North. A whisper ran down the ranks of Swain's column.

"The Varangs!"

Grim smiles lighted the bearded faces of the guards; the newcomers straightened instinctively, with answering grins. There was an undercurrent of subdued, guttural remarks.

"Ho, it is Eindridi Ungi back again!" "And Swain Olaf's son." "Well, well, are all the Orkney folk here?" "Ha, little Jon Eyulf's son, how are the fish biting in Aurridafirth?" "There is Rafn Fot—Foot—in the green and red tunic. He must be the emperor's favorite."

Swain made no attempt to check the exchanges of gossip. It was good for his men to be friendly with the Varangs. Much might depend upon it.

Inside the building a commodious vestibule was lined with ranks of the Varangians, leaning upon their great axes. A murmur of "skoal!" came from their lips as the visitors entered, and Swain's men, ignorant of palace manners, thundered an audible response that drew shocked protests from the bedizened chamberlains who marshaled the procession for its final progress.

"Keep them silent, Swain," fidgeted Eindridi. "The emperor might hear."

Swain's lips curled.

"Shall not brothers wish one another health when they meet?"

"But you do not understand! The emperor is just within."

"King Ingi would not object to a friendly clamor amongst his house-carls. Why should the Emperor of Mikligard?"

"You are ignorant," gibbered Eindridi. "Here no man lifts his voice—yes, or his head—unless the emperor bids him."

"That is not the way I regulate my life," returned Swain.

And he shouted abruptly in the Vallska speech to the chamberlains who still hovered in front of the Northmen's column:

"Make haste, Greeks! Tell the emperor that Swain Olaf's son waits."

With that he strode forward, while all the Varangs along the walls chuckled behind their shields as the chamberlains flew this way and that way, stumbling over one another in their hurry to unfasten the cedarwood doors which formed the opposite wall of the vestibule.

Entirely heedless of the confusion he created, Swain marched resolutely on, Eindridi, on one side of him, scowling and ill at ease, Erling, on his other side, peering at all the marvelous sights with as frank a curiosity as the youngest man in their train. Armod and Oddi, who had no thoughts for anything but the new sensations which were piling upon them, walked with the chiefs, in a waking dream. But they, no less than Swain, were impelled to realization of the majesty they approached when the scurrying chamberlains folded back the doors and the magic scene within was disclosed to their startled eyes.

Before them stretched a wide hall, its farther wall composed of three apse-like recesses, fashioned in the semblance of the sea-shells after which the building was named. In the middle of the central and largest recess was a platform of precious woods, plated and embossed with silver and covered with rare cloths, and on this was reared a golden throne ablaze with gems. On the throne sat a man larger than Swain, dark, with a restless, eager face and an air of high resolve, his abnormal stature, heavy shoulders and barrel-chest made to look larger than they actually were by the stiff garments of ceremony he wore and the high-peaked crown that would have dwarfed an ordinary man.

Around this man were gathered a group of nobles and great folk, whose costumes were almost as resplendent as his. There was armor that was carved and chased; there were tunics of rich velvets and filmy silks; there were furs and jewelry. The wearers were as various as their attire: Greeks, slim and supple; Armenians, with hooked noses and straying eyes; Slavs, blond and high in the cheek-bones; men whose Tatar blood showed in slant eyes and snub noses; Syrians with clever, crafty faces.

But Swain saw only one face amongst the scores about the throne, a face that peered from beneath a helmet rim directly behind the Emperor Manuel and to his right; a fierce, predatory face, with a huge bush of dense, black beard cascading over silken-covered mail and growing close up to unwinking eyes that owned a peculiar metallic luster.

NO SHIFT of position revealed that Swain had recognized his enemy, the enemy he had hounded from the North, to procure whose death he had voyaged to the other end of the world, in pursuit of whom he should yet journey to lands few other men had ever known. His right hand clenched involuntarily at his side; he nodded imperceptibly to Eindridi's exclamation:

"There is Olvir Rosta! In my place, curse him!"

Slowly, with jingle of harness and clanking scabbard, Swain paced up the splendid hall at the head of his viking-farers, and there was not a sound to break that steady tread of a thousand feet, the rattling of half a thousand shields, until Swain halted and raised his clenched right hand above his helm, as his voice boomed out under the soaring half-domes:

"Stand, Swain's men!"

His eyes were on Olvir's in that moment of anticipated triumph, and his teeth were slightly bared in the ghost of a cruel grimace as he saw a drop of sweat bead out under the gilded helmet of the outlaw and trickle into the tangle of Olvir's beard. He knew, now, that Olvir knew, that Olvir must be experiencing all the agonies of uncertainty and fear which come to the bravest of men when an enmy achieves the unexpected. A moment past Olvir had been secure in the knowledge that he was of those nearest to the imperial throne, his most serious concern to hold the honor he had wrested from feckless Eindridi, to placate Eindridi or otherwise dispose of him. Now! Ah, now, Olvir must be raking desperately for plan and counter-plan, bending nimble wits and crafty intellect to the task of outguessing the enemy who had come upon him without warning.

There was a pleased smile on Swain's face as he turned from Olvir to the Emperor Manuel, who had leaned forward with kindling gaze to survey the column of Northmen; but the frosty blue eyes that met the emperor's puzzled stare contained no hint of mirth. They burned with an intensity of determination that carried across the invisible barrier which stretched before the throne.

Eindridi plumped on to his knees, as the chamberlains who had skipped along in front of Swain threw themselves upon their faces, wiggling abjectly against the cold mosaic of the floor.

"Down!" he hissed, under cover of his hand.

Swain glanced about him. Perhaps there was an altar he had not seen; he had little use for church, at any time, but he was prepared to conciliate the religious prejudices of the Greeks—and of course, being a chief carried with it certain obligations. But he saw no altar, only the curious stone pictures and paintings in the half-domes, which were all of men hunting or fighting or sitting on thrones while other men adored them.

So he surveyed the remainder of his surroundings, and perceived the emperor frowning slightly and looks of mingled indignation and surprize on the faces of the bystanders—who, however, had not fallen upon their knees in the absurd posture which Eindridi affected.

"Down!" hissed the unfortunate Varang again.

Erling shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other, and looked from Eindridi to Swain. The men of the column simply cast stolid eyes toward whatever attracted their attention. From the moment they had been addressed as "Swain's men" they had had no doubt as to what they should do. Even those from Eindridi's ship shared in the general sentiment. Swain was chief; let him decide what was to be done. Then they would do it. Several of the younger men grinned at the undignified position of the gilded warrior, but they never thought to emulate him. They awaited the word from Swain.

He met the situation quite simply.

"Health to the emperor!" he cried.

And with a rush and a swish and a clink of steel that made the nearest courtiers cower and brought the emperor bounding to his feet, five hundred swords flashed from five hundred scabbards, and five hundred deep voices roared in answer:

"Health to the Emperor!"

Eindridi pulled himself hastily erect, his gaze darting affrightedly in every direction.

"He will never forgive you," he wailed as the half-domes tossed back the echoes of that shout. "To bare steel in the imperial presence! And you have not prostrated yourself. Quick, Swain, before he calls in his guards."

"I prostrate myself to no man," growled Swain. "And I think the emperor liked our greeting. He has the look of a warrior to me."

Indeed, the one calm man in the hall, outside the ranks of the Northmen, was the emperor, who stood at the edge of the dais, dominating by sheer physical bulk every one present, a light of whimsical amusement in his haughty face. Every courtier was either whispering to another or endeavoring to get as far away as possible from the mailed column that had overflowed the space in front of the throne. But it was the emperor who spoke aloud.

"By the Forerunner, Eindridi," he said in Greek, "you have lived up to your promises—which I am bound to say I accounted boasts at the time—and returned with the most promising band of recruits I have ever seen. Although it might be held that they are untutored in court usage."

In saying which last he grinned in a most unimperial way.

"Oh, they little know, Magnificence!" answered Eindridi. "It was ignorance, Lord, all ignorance."

Swain, who could not understand what had been said, stepped a pace in front of Eindridi.

"If it please you, Lord Emperor," he said in the Vallska tongue, "I am chief of these men. I have no Greek."

The emperor grinned wider still.

"And who are you?" he returned in Vallska as fluent as Swain's, for he was one who loved all the ways of the western nations and was much given to affecting their speech and habits.

"I am Swain Olaf's son, a landholder in the Orkneyar."

"And do you come here to serve me in my Varang Guards?"

"No, Lord, certain of our number came with Eindridi Ungi to take service in your guard, but the most of us—" his gaze darted past the emperor to where Olvir Rosta lurked behind the throne, and he decided the time was not come to speak out his purpose—"voyaged with him to serve our private honor."

"So you come to Mikligard only from curiosity?" asked the emperor.

Swain hesitated.

"From curiosity, yes, Lord, and to perform deeds which will procure us honor."

The emperor thrust out his hand.

"That is a most honorable enterprise, Swain," he said, "and I applaud your intention. It is my delight to assist all lords who desire to secure merit for themselves, and if I can help you in securing an opportunity to show your prowess I shall do so."

But this was more than Olvir Rosta could support; the fear that had overwhelmed him with the sudden appartition of his deadly enemy kindled his hatred aflame.

"Lord," he cried. "Christ-loving One! Divinely favored!"

He mumbled in his rage as he strove to recall the flamboyant titles the Greeks confered upon their ruler.

"Do not heed him, I pray you! He lies. He is here because he is my deadly enemy, and he pursues me through the world to destroy me."

A look as cold and merciless as that which flared in Swain's eyes came into the emperor's.

"Is this true?" he demanded. "Have you dragged a Northern brawl into my palace?"

Swain shrugged his shoulders.

"The man is my enemy, Lord. He murdered my mother, my father, my——"

"With what he did in his own land I have no concern," the emperor interrupted sharply. "Here he is my man, and has served me faithfully. More I can not ask, and I am one to protect my servants, Swain."

"It was not I who put him in your palace," replied Swain. "Must I go out because he is here?"

The courtiers held their breaths; Eindridi gave a moan of horror; Olvir, himself, prayed that the imperial dignity would rise up and blast this impudent stranger, who scorned to show any consideration for the elaborate ceremonial of the Byzantine Court. But the emperor amazed them all by laughing.

"No, Swain, I shall not order you from Mikligard, simply because your enemy is here. The two of you can well protect yourselves, but I lay an interdict upon you against fighting, for I see clearly that if you and Olvir took to quarreling it would spread throughout my Varang Guards—and I can not afford to lose them in broils amongst themselves."

Swain frowned and remained silent.

"Come," urged the emperor, extending his hand again. "You are a man I should not wish for my enemy, but I can not allow you to come here from your Northern land and upset my affairs. Be my man for the time you remain in Mikligard, and——"

"I am my own man," answered Swain abruptly. "That is well known in my own country. I will serve you at need, Lord, but as my own man."

And to the renewed horror of the assemblage he took the emperor's hand in his and shook it. For an instant the emperor regarded him in displeased amazement. Then the imperial laughter broke the tension a second time.

"You are a strong man, Swain," said the emperor. "And I am generally accounted a strong man. Let us see which can outgrip the other."

"Gladly," assented Swain.

They settled their hands firmly together, and applied pressure, one to the other, while the court looked on in an excess of dazed consternation. The cords and muscles of their wrists swelled with the strain of their efforts; their jaws clenched; beads of sweat broke upon their foreheads; their shoulders bowed; their legs quivered—and all of a sudden their hands seemed to fly apart.

"You bested me," cried the emperor.

And simultaneously Swain exclaimed—

"I might not stand it, Lord."

The emperor burst out laughing and Swain chuckled as few men had ever heard him do, for he was one never given to mirth.

"No, no, Swain," insisted the emperor, "I had all that I wanted. My fingers hurt me still."

"And I say that I loosed because I might not hold you longer," replied Swain.

The emperor gave him an odd look of appraisal.

"It was a drawn match," he decided. "And I take pleasure in it, Swain, for I perceive you are not a man to yield to me because I am emperor."

"Why should I?" asked Swain, surprized.

"Many here could explain it to you at length," answered the emperor. "But it would not interest you. Do you ride with the lance?"

"No, no, Lord," denied Swain. "I am a plain, simple warrior. I ride a horse by times to get me to battle, but when I am there I fight upon my two legs with shield and sword, or, perhaps, shield and ax."

"A pity," said the emperor. "I should have liked to tilt with you with blunted lances. It is a rare sport."

"We can test ourselves with blunted swords, if you like," rejoined Swain. "That should be better sport. But before we forget it, Lord, there is a matter I would discuss with you."

The emperor sank back upon his throne.

"Let it bide, Swain, until we can talk it over by ourselves," he adjured. "Your men must be weary from their ships. I will send them to the quarters of the Varangians, where they will find food and drink and comrades to talk their own speech; but you shall sup with me."

He waved a hand to the chamberlains.

"Order the feast for the stranger guests. The court is dismissed. I will spend the evening alone with the Lord Swain."

Two heralds stepped out and blew a blast. Four chamberlains, bearing ivory wands of office, backed away before the throne as the emperor leisurely descended from the dais with one hand resting on Swain's forearm. The great officers of the empire, Olvir Rosta at their head, started to follow him, but the emperor waved them away a trifle testily.

"No, no," he ordered. "A truce to state."

An aged Greek ventured a feeble protest.

"Without the grand acolyte who shall protect your Mightiness?"

"The grand acolyte's enemy," snapped the emperor. "But I do not require a guard, Patroclus. Thanks to the Virgin, my right arm is my best aid."

At a low door in the rear of the hall Swain looked back, impelled by a power as potent as words. Across that splendid scene Olvir Rosta's eyes glared into his with a malignance that stabbed like a knife. Almost, Swain was tempted to spin around and charge through the turgid throng, sword in hand, and force an issue with his enemy. But the emperor drew him on into the door-way.

"You are a man I have been waiting for, Swain," Manuel was saying. "If I had my choice I would be a wandering warrior, plying my trade wherever the fighting was best. But instead I must do my fighting hedged around with guards and ceremonies. We Greeks bow too readily to majesty. By Hercules, but I like a man who meets me toe to toe!"

CHAPTER X

OF HOW SWAIN FEASTED WITH THE EMPEROR, AND OF THE BEGINNING OF THE PLAN SWAIN DEVISED TO SECURE VENGEANCE UPON OLVIR ROSTA

SWAIN found himself now in a dim corridor lighted by lamps which burned an aromatic oil. His footfalls were muffled in the deep pile of the rugs that carpeted the tiled floor. Arras covered the walls, and he had a vague sense of uneasiness which he presently realized came from the fact that for the first time since he had entered the precincts of the palace he was alone with one other man—that the other man was the emperor he all but forgot in the intimacy of their abrupt comradeship.

"By the Hammer!" he exclaimed, his voice muffled like his footfalls by the enshrouding cloths that draped the passage. "This is no place for a man bred to war, Lord Emperor."

The emperor caught himself up in his stride and sighed.

"You say the truth, Swain," he agreed. "It is a hotbed of vice and envy and selfishness. I am never so happy as when I can find excuse to abandon it for tent or trireme. But an emperor is as powerless as the least of his subjects when he encounters the customs of the state. To be alone is the greatest privilege, yes, and the rarest—Hark!"

He interrupted himself, bending his ear in the direction from which they had come, and Swain imitated him. They heard distinctly in the scented gloom the slurring *pad-pad* of slippered feet, a gasp of short-breathed haste.

Swain's hand instinctively gripped sword-hilt, but the emperor shook his head, smiling.

"No, no. Death comes not so within a palace, Swain. You do not hear it in the distance. This is but one of the many forms of watchfulness I must encounter, spying, service, officiousness, whatever you call it."

"I would hew off the knave's feet at the ankles," growled Swain.

"What use?" returned the emperor. "His breed are without end. Dispose of one, and a dozen arise in his place."

They had stopped in an interval of shadow midway betwixt two of the bronze lamps that hung suspended by chains from the barrel-vaulted roof, and as they looked back an eery figure pattered into the circle of illumination cast by the lamp behind them. A loose, belted robe of figured velvet cloaked the fat body; the gold chain of office rose and fell with the puffing of the flabby chest; the plump, pink, hairless features were stamped with a sinister intelligence which gave the lie to the fixed, bland smile they perpetually bore; one dimpled fist held a golden-tipped ivory wand, the other clutched a roll of parchment.

"It is Nicephorus, the chief of the eunuchs," said the emperor.

The strange creature plopped down upon cushioned knees at sound of the emperor's voice.

"Augustus!" it wheezed. "Divine Cæsar! Christ-loving monarch of——"

"What is it, Nicephorus?" interjected Manuel. "As you see, I am engaged with the Lord Swain."

The eunuch glanced slyly at Swain—and looked as slyly away. And Swain snarled in his beard at the impact of an hostility as slimy and revolting as a serpent's.

"Lord Emperor," it wheezed again in thin, piping tones, "it was told me that you had departed this way, and your servant followed in the hope that he might——"

"I require nothing," said the emperor curtly.

"There was an errand placed upon me," the eunuch panted on. "Bardanes the patrician came to the Outer Hall of Audience——"

"I gave orders to the domestic of the Scholarii that I granted no audiences today," replied the emperor.

"Ah, Magnificence! But the barbarians of the Varang Guard did not understand. They admitted Bardanes to the Outer Hall, and he was in much grief when I encountered him. He urged that I should carry you this scroll which contains a petition——"

"For which service he paid you ample store of Byzants," commented Manuel scornfully.

The eunuch raised both hands in a gesture of horror.

"Augustus! How could you think it! Bardanes assured your servant that the inhabitants of Rodosto abide in agony the tidings that you are graciously pleased to grant the humble petition he offers in their——"

"What says he?" demanded the emperor, waving aside the scroll.

"Oh, it is a mere nothing, Mightiness! No more than the farming of the local taxes. Clysthenes is collector of the city, and there is feeling that he does not render to Rome that which is Rome's, as the Son of God commanded that man should——"

"Leave out the Holiest One from your argument," ordered the emperor coldly. "I have heard of the feud between Clysthenes and Bardanes. Carry the scroll to the Logothete, and bid him present it for my attention, if he deems that to be fitting. You may go."

Nicephorus scrambled to his feet, with

another sidewise glance of malicious hatred toward Swain.

"Your servant kisses your feet, Augustus," he piped. "May I usher you——"

"Go!"

Nicephorus padded back down the corridor, with a swish of his heavy draperies. Swain, who had understood nothing of the conversation, half-drew his sword as the eunuch passed through the first spot of light.

"Shall I slay the snake?" he asked. "He is your man or I would have smote him as he stood."

"No, no," denied the emperor. "He has his uses, vile though they be."

"I would stake three gold arm-rings I could make him squirm," said Swain speculatively.

The receding figure of the eunuch seemed to hunch itself together at the words, and for a fleeting second the fat-jowled face peered over one bulgy shoulder.

"I doubt it not," answered the emperor. "But no man tortured a eunuch and had pleasure of it. They know too much, and once you start one babbling his evil tongue wags on. Moreover, they are a close-bound community among themselves, and he who harms one of them, be he emperor, patrician or common man, is like to pay dear for it. Had I my way I would drown the lot of them in the Bosphorus, but I own I fear to attempt it."

Swain regarded him in simple amazement.

"Fear advances no man," he expostulated. "For myself, Lord, I hate men, but never have I feared one."

"Ah," said the emperor. "But you are not Emperor of Mikligard, as you call it, Swain. For myself, I admit that, however I hate them, I owe much to the eunuchs. They fetch me information I require; they bring to my notice men who are valuable to me. Why, that fellow Nicephorus was the means of presenting to me my grand acolyte, whom you call your enemy, but whom I know for a stalwart, resolute fellow of few words. He keeps his men in hand, does what he is ordered to and is a desperate fighter at need."

Swain frowned bleakly.

"It was touching this I desired further speech with you," he answered. "I have told you that Olvir is my enemy. I tell you now that he is an outlaw from his own country, and I might tell you more, but that you regard me as prejudiced——"

"You have said that you could hate men," remarked the emperor, smiling, "and I take you at your word. Let us not go further into the subject, for I like you too much to argue with you."

"And I desire to respect you as I might not a man who treated another unjustly," retorted Swain doggedly.

"How, now?" demanded Manuel, eyebrows raised in astonishment. "What means this? Because I see fit to employ your enemy, am I to be told that I——"

"You do not understand," said Swain. "For the moment I do not speak of myself, but of Eindridi."

"Oh!"

The emperor growled in his beard, much as Swain was accustomed to doing.

"That popinjay!"

"Eindridi is a fool," admitted Swain, "but he is also a brave man, and I call him my friend."

The emperor dropped a kindly hand on the Orkneyman's shoulder.

"That is well spoken, Swain," he applauded. "I admire a man who will speak up for another who has tasted misfortune. There are not many of your kind in Mikligard. But if you know Eindridi, you know why I seized advantage of his request for permission to visit his homeland——"

"*Humph!*" said Swain. "Then you did not send him for recruits?"

"Not I," chuckled the emperor. "I have no wars to wage at the moment, and I require no more men, albeit I am always glad to take into my service such stout fellows as you led in before me. But the truth as to Eindridi is that the fellow schemed and intrigued his way to the post he had, and then was not content until he might go home and preen himself before his friends.

"He came to me, himself, with the suggestion that Olvir should take his place, and when he left I had no thought of supplanting him permanently, but the discipline of the Varangs improved, and the folk of the palace took kindly to Olvir, and Nicephorus and others urged that he would be a better acolyte than Eindridi—doubtless for a consideration from him. But I was constrained to agree with them, in part, because I did not like it that Eindridi sought to leave his post for the better part of three seasons, and also because I was glad to be rid of his perpetual vanity.

There is more than enough of that last quality in this court, and I look to the Varangs to furnish me an escape from it."

"Nicephorus told you that Olvir would make a better officer than Eindridi," ruminated Swain. "Lord, did it not enter your head that Olvir might have offered certain services for it?"

The emperor laughed.

"I never doubted it, Swain. That is the custom of the court."

"So that you can trust no man to speak to you honestly or without intent to obtain money from one source or another?"

"Not one man, priest or layman."

"Give me time to work upon Eindridi, and I would guarantee his honesty in that regard," offered Swain.

Again the emperor laughed.

"If you were here by his elbow, Swain, that might be so. But be at your ease as to Eindridi. He has deserved well of me, in that he brought you here with him and a better supply of recruits than I expected of his swollen promises. He shall be strategos of the Bukellarian Theme, and test his merits in defending the mountain passes against Saracen raiders. And now, I beg you, let us forget Eindridi and Olvir, and tell me of your adventures in journeying hither. As likewise, whatever you can of the wars of your people, for I try to learn from every warrior who visits me all that I may of the habits and methods of the different warlike nations."

They had reached the end of the corridor, apparently a blank wall, but the emperor touched a carved flower in a cedar panel as he spoke, and a door opened upon a plainly furnished chamber overhanging the water. There was a simple bed in one corner. Fur rugs were on the floor, arms on the walls. A table was set with massy silver. But there was no evidence of the extreme lavishness that prevailed elsewhere in the vast, rambling extent of the palace. Swain inhaled the salty breeze that poured through opened windows with a gulp of satisfaction.

"Ha, Lord, that is the air to nourish heroes on! In my country we are never without it, waking or sleeping."

"And it is for that reason you grow the most stalwart fighting-men in my armies," returned Manuel. "The time was, Swain, when we Greeks upheld the traditions of old Rome by our unaided efforts, but today we must call upon foreigners to bear the brunt of battle. Yet some few of us may still be worthy to follow the standards that were raised by Constantine and Heraclius and Leo."

He took an enormous spear and shield from a corner of the room and balanced them as if for the fray.

"I have yet to meet the man who can hold my lance in his one hand," he said proudly.

Swain silently extended his right hand, and with a saturnine gleam in his eye the emperor surrendered the weapon. But the saturnine expression vanished as Swain lightly poised the spear, tossed it toward the lofty ceiling, caught it again in his hand and brandished it as though it had been a javelin.

"You are the first who has done so!" exclaimed the emperor.

"I do many things that other men can not do," replied Swain.

"I believe you," cried Manuel. "We might have been sons of the one birth."

He cast his immense, silver-scrolled shield into its corner with a resounding clang, and clapped his hands together; and to the serving-varlet who answered the summons he delivered a rapid command in Greek, then haled Swain to the table which was set in a recess by the windows.

"We will eat," he said, "and while we eat we will talk. Tell me of yourself, Swain. Are you a noble in your own land? Do you stand in the favor of your king?"

"I am a noble," replied Swain, "but without title. I do not stand in my king's favor, because I have no use for any other man's favor. What I require I take. What I intend I do."

The emperor hurled his crown into a cushioned chair, writhed out of the heavier of his ceremonial robes and threw himself upon a window-seat, his face now alight with humor.

"Do you talk so to the king's face?" he demanded.

"Why not?" asked Swain.

"And what says he?"

"Very little, for I seldom see him."

"You do not go to court, then?"

"No, Lord. Courts do not interest me. They are, as you have disclosed to me of your own, places where men tell lies and seek to betray one another."

"What do you do?"

"I attend to the management of my lands——"

"Ho, you have lands!"

The emperor was increasingly interested.

"What is their extent?"

Swain told him, and the imperial face was tinged with respect.

"That is a handsome estate, Swain. I thank the blessed saints few of my patricians own such areas to misgovern. But I interrupted you. You manage your lands—and what else?"

"In the Summer, after the Spring planting, I go viking-faring."

"Against your king's enemies?"

"Against my enemies, Lord."

This time the humor twinkled in Swain's eyes.

"All men who are not my friends are my enemies."

"A convenient code," agreed the emperor. "And what then?"

"Why, then we return home in time for the harvest. And in the Fall, if the weather is not too bad, we go viking-faring again."

"I should not like to dwell in the parts adjacent to you." commented the emperor.

"Men say that we bear hard upon the landward folk," assented Swain.

"So that in the Fall you put up your ships," continued Manuel, as several varlets filed into the chamber and deftly spread platters of meats on the table before Manuel and Swain. "And that brings you to the Winter again, and the management of your lands."

"And the rearing of my sons," amended Swain, sinking his teeth into a pullet roasted in wine.

"Ho!" exclaimed the emperor. "you are more fortunate than I. What do you do with them?"

"I rear them to be warriors, expert with weapons, skilled in shipcraft, with knowledge of the devices by which men win battles."

"So would I rear sons of mine—if the Heavenly Hosts would but see fit to answer my prayers. But a man as ambitious as you must have some object in view for his sons."

Swain met the emperor's gaze fairly, and a spark of icy fire burned in his hard blue eyes.

"First and last, morning and evening, Summer and Winter, Spring and Autumn, come fair weather, come foul, in sickness and health, in ill fortune and good, I teach them that Olvir Rosta is their enemy, the slayer of their grandmother, who tended them as babes, of the grandfather they never knew and of their uncles, yes, and of many——"

The emperor lifted an admonitory hand.

"That is a subject we were to avoid, Swain," he said in the voice that he could make as coldly implacable as the icy fire in Swain's eyes.

"You asked, Lord," rejoined Swain, shrugging his shoulders.

Manuel hesitated an instant, then burst into involuntary laughter.

"So I did. Well, that fault is mine. But as I have said, I have a fancy for your friendship——"

"To possess my friendship you must have me hate your enemies, and that means that you hate mine," said Swain.

A shadow blanketed the emperor's face.

"Alas, Swain," he answered, "you are thinking of friendships between men, not those mercurial affairs which are all that fate permits between a sovereign and a common man. My friendship is worth little or much, and I can not tell which it may be; but it is more likely to be one-sided against you than in your favor."

"Why should I seek your friendship, then?" challenged Swain.

"I had hoped that you would find it pleasant."

"How shall I enjoy it when you would seek to turn it to account by making it a shield for my enemy?"

"The man you call your enemy," the emperor pointed out gently, "is a loyal defender of the state which I govern. He is a part of the system I employ in the management of my lands. Would you——"

"*Humph*," growled Swain. "I see what you mean. I once quarreled with the Jarl who rules the Orkneys for the sake of a man of mine who was a fool, if he was not a rogue."

"If Olvir betrayed the trust I put in him," resumed the emperor, "it would be different; but I can not dismiss or punish him for whatever he did before he entered my service. Here we judge our foreign troops by what they do for us."

"You are right, Lord Emperor," admitted Swain. "Well, it makes no difference in the end. I shall slay Olvir, whoever stands his friend, if not in Mikligard, why, then, in another place."

"By the ——, I believe you!" exclaimed

the emperor. "I should not care to have you for my enemy, Swain. But we had best find other matters to discuss. Tell me of the quarrel with your Jarl. Did you have the best of him?"

Now, in that moment an idea entered Swain's head, which he promptly turned to account.

"I am no man to tell tales of what I have done," he answered gruffly. "I can answer such plain questions as you ask me, Lord. But if it be tales that you desire I have in my company two skalds who are skilled in all manner of lays, sagas and tales, and who have the Vallska speech as well as our own Norse."

The emperor's face brightened.

"I have heard of these Northern skalds," he cried. "Men say they are akin to the troubadours of the Franks and Italians, who can magic care away, as I, myself, can avouch, having had experience with them at the court of my brother of Jerusalem."

"Touching the troubadours I know nothing," returned Swain. "But as to Armod, he is called the Skald, which in our land is the highest praise that can be given a man. It is as if I was called Swain the Warrior——"

"And what," inquired the emperor curiously, "are you called, Swain?"

Swain looked out the window at the purple evening sky and the lights of villa, monastery and village on the farther Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus. The skin under his ruddy beard was flushed a brick-red.

"They call me Jarl-maker," he answered. "But I was speaking of my skalds. As to Oddi the Little, if he is not so polished a man as Armod, he has more humor, and there is none who can so hearten the fighting-men on the eve of battle or the rowers when the waves are breaking over the shield-tops. And both can use sword and ax in any company."

"They must be men of very superior attainments," remarked the emperor. "I shall take delight in meeting them, Swain. But suffer me to remind you that you were to relate me the more moving passages of your last voyage. I am prepared for a story brief in outline and sparing of detail, but I shall fill it in from the skalds' accounts. Only, I pray you, take my mind off the cares of empire for the time that water-clock requires to fill the lesser bowl."

"I will do what I may," growled Swain.

And he talked until the lesser bowl had been filled, and emptied into the bigger one and the bigger drained a second time. For whenever he sought to stop the emperor would spur him on again. But at last he rose with an air of finality.

"I must go to my men," he said.

"There speaks the careful general," replied Manuel reluctantly. "The hour is late, and you must be weary. But as to your men, Swain, I fear they will have returned to their ships long since."

He walked to a door in one of the sides of the chamber, and clapped his hands twice; and to the servant who entered addressed a single question.

"Yes," he said. "They have marched back, under escort of the Varangs, all of them very drunk. Had you not better spend the night in the palace?"

"Away from my men?" rasped Swain. "Never!"

"You are right," agreed the emperor. "But you could not find your way in the darkness through the city. I must find a guide for you. Come, we will see who is yet astir."

HE LED the way into an antechamber somewhat more luxurious than the inner room in which Swain had been entertained. It was deserted, except for a single one of the pink-skinned, pot-bellied eunuchs, grotesque in gown and peaked hat, ivory staff in hand, who flung himself upon his knees at the emperor's feet.

"Ah, Isaac," greeted Manuel, "I am glad that I have found you. The Lord Swain's people have all returned to their ships, and he must have a guide across the city for himself. Go with him to the officer of the watch at the Great Gate, and acquaint whoever is in command that he is to have suitable escort."

And to Swain the emperor added in the Vallska tongue:

"Isaac will put you on your way. I will send for you again on the morrow, and you shall fetch me your skalds. And after that I will take you and your people to the sports in the Hippodrome."

He wagged his head sorrowfully.

"They are tame enough compared to the jousting tournaments the Frankish lords hold, but the priests make my life miserable for me if even a common man is slain in list-fighting."

"Priests are silly fools," growled Swain. "I have known one or two who could hold their own, but the most of them are no better than women. Perhaps we can set them aside one of these days."

"I wish it might be so," agreed the emperor; "but I would sooner assail the whole band of eunuchs than draw upon me the wrath of one priest. Remember, Swain, that in Mikligard you are my guest. Ask for what you desire."

"What I desire you will not grant me," rumbled Swain. "Nevertheless, you are a man I would like to have next me in the shield-wall. We shall know each other better some day, Lord Emperor."

"I pray that we shall," answered the emperor.

And with that they parted, and Swain followed the eunuch through echoing, empty halls and moonlit gardens, where the only persons they met were occasional yawning guards and soft-footed, pink-skinned creatures of the abominable order to which his guide belonged, who exchanged a whispered word or stealthy glance with Isaac and pattered on.

CHAPTER XI

OF HOW SWAIN SLEW THE SEVEN EUNUCHS, AND OF THE DEED HE PERFORMED TO WIN FORTH OF THE CITY

THE centurion of the guards at the great gate of the palace was asleep, and the sentinels of the Scholarii on duty merely grinned at the contrast between the giant in brine-rusted mail and the soggy figure mincing at his elbow. They made no effort to stop the pair, for the company of one of the palace eunuchs was passport for any man, as well as ground for implying questionable motives on his part. And it did not seem strange to Swain that Isaac led him on without a word to the Greeks, inasmuch as he had not understood the emperor's instructions.

They passed out beneath the stone picture of the Christ, its vivid colors overlaid by a translucent patina of moonlight, into the Forum of the Augustation; opposite, the Church of St. Sophia seemed more than ever to float skyward in the purple dusk, and the Palace of the Senate bulked at the head of its wide flights of steps, sonorous with the dignity of the ages. The wall of the Hippodrome was a cliff of granite, and the bristling figures which crowned the high-flung parapet quivered in the moonglow with an illusion of life.

Swain strode through this scene of poignant beauty and ancient power with complete indifference, but Isaac's warped soul was touched by the innate grandeur of something, which he, no less than Swain, could not assess or understand.

"The center of the universe, Lord Swain," he babbled shrilly.

He stabbed with his ivory staff at the soaring column of Constantine, which fairly leaped from the tessellated paving, its brazen statue hung between heaven and earth, one outflung arm pointing eastward in a perpetual gesture of defiance of that Asia which was the brood-nest of the empire's most potent foes.

"Here, men say, is the exact spot whence shall be blown the final trump. Here is the hub of the world, and all beside this must seem little and——"

"Make haste," interrupted Swain sharply. "And guide me the shortest way to my men."

The eunuch gave him an oddly startled look.

"Oh, yes, Lord! Whatever you wish. You have only to speak. Your servant——"

"Be silent."

Isaac's flabby lips clamped together, and an ugly expression dawned in the eyes he discreetly veiled; but he made no retort, and trotted vigorously to keep pace with Swain's long strides.

There were few folk abroad in the Augustation, and fewer still in the side streets they presently entered, and these few steered wide of the steeple-crowned hat and the tapping irovy staff. Once Isaac looked back over his shoulder, and again, as they left the respectable quarter for the crowded tenement blocks nearer the waterfront, Swain fancied he heard footfalls behind them.

"What was that?" he barked.

"I heard nothing, lord," whinnied Isaac.

Swain listened an instant longer, and then decided that his ears had been deceived or else some prowler had caught the glint of his mail and slunk away.

"We will go on," he said.

The streets became narrower and darker, shadowy slits in the high-piled masses of masonry and timber that housed the city's poor. And people disappeared altogether.

An occasional lamp flared above the entrance to tavern or brothel, and from behind barred and shuttered windows came oaths and sighs and shouts and snatches of song, an old woman's heavy snore, the fretful wail of a child; all round was life, hot and pulsing. But Swain and Isaac walked by themselves in the midst of it as much alone as though Mikligard was not.

Slip-slip, *clank-clank* on the greasy cobbles, up alleys, around corners into noisome lanes, through stews that stank, past an open sewer whence came the rush of hidden waters, to a five-way crossing dimly revealed by a flickering cresset on the wall of a hovel that carried over the door the bush of a wine-shop. Here Isaac halted, as if uncertain of his path, peering to right and left.

"Well, well," snarled Swain. "Have you lost your way, fool? We have gone far enough to——"

A queer clucking noise escaped Isaac's lips, and the shadows vibrated to the rush of half a dozen long-robed figures. Crooked-bladed knives flashed from every side; piping voices squealed; and Swain crashed on the cobbles, skilfully tripped by Isaac's staff.

His assailants hurled themselves upon him with a shrill clamor, their knives rapping on his mail-coat, while pudgy hands seized limbs and throat and treacherous fingers poked at his eyeballs. But Swain was not so easily trapped. He rolled and kicked and heaved and twisted, every muscle straining to shake off the tussling mob. He tore loose his shield-arm first, and threw the shield at those who struggled to pin his legs. Then he got the other arm free, and wrenched at the thing that bored into his eyes, flailing the pulpy body right and left like a maul until he had beaten his enemies from him and was able to stagger up.

One of the eunuchs lay groaning against a house wall; one corpse Swain clutched in his death-grip; five more of the uncanny creatures circled warily on the margin of the shadows, chirping and clucking excitedly.

"So you are Olvir's, too!" growled Swain. "I might have known he would favor such company."

The words were not out of his mouth when Isaac thrust with the staff to trip him a second time and another eunuch kicked Swain's shield at his feet; but Swain sprang lightly over staff and scuttering shield and tossed the body of his victim in Isaac's face. He thought to unsheath his sword, and accepted several stabs as he dodged back and forth; but the evil pack were close upon him, and he had opportunity to slay only one before they had overset him, obliging him to drop his sword, in order to have both hands free to fend off the slashing knives.

All that saved him this time was the blind ferocity of his opponents and their numbers, which made them tumble in each other's way, and enabled him to disembowel one with a knife he snatched from his own throat.

The thing's scream and the gush of blood unnerved the rest long enough to permit him to roll clear; but he was swordless again and the eunuch with the broken arm was afoot to rejoin the fray. And to make his case worse, the four survivors launched a sudden rush at him which drove him into a corner and enabled Isaac to pick up his sword.

"This is the end, Northman," screamed Isaac, and the others added their thin, high voices in outlandish jubilation.

"*Humph*," growled Swain. "This is a better fight than might have been expected."

And he ran in close and ducked as the eunuch brandished the sword for a swinging cut at his head. The blade circled over him and slashed into the midriff of one of Isaac's companions, who had his bane of it; and Swain plunged his knife into Isaac's heart and ripped the sword from the eunuch's fingers, all in the one instant.

"Now we are one to two, and the odds are fairly on my side," he said.

Where he stood he was revealed distinctly in the light of the guttering cresset, but his enemies were hidden in the shadows that danced around the edge of the scanty area of illumination. They perceived that he could not be sure from which direction they would attack, so they took the robe of one of their dead companions and wrapped it about Isaac's staff, and this they suddenly cast at Swain, as if it was a man leaping. And Swain, as was natural, seeing the robe come hurtling from the shadows, slashed at it with his sword, which became entangled in the folds of cloth.

Then the two eunuchs came at him, one from each side. The whole one of the pair gripped him by the leg and overturned him, and he would have had his throat cut had he not happened to catch the broken arm of the crippled eunuch as he fell. The twist he gave the limb so tortured the poor wretch that the knife went wide, and Swain was able to sever the back-bone of the thing that held his feet. With this he scrambled erect, and found himself with but the one enemy to face, and that one groaning in agony.

"Who set you to this deed?" demanded Swain.

But the creature would do no more than scream and gibber, for the heart was gone from it.

"You are no use to me," said Swain. "And if I have achieved so much, I had better make a clean sweep of the deck."

He stood off a pace, raised his sword over his shoulder and hewed the last of the seven eunuchs in two pieces—from shoulder to thigh bit the sword, and clicked on the cobbles.

Swain was much pleased with this last blow, and he stood for a while, admiring his handiwork. But he soon became conscious that the fray had attracted attention. Voices whispered behind shutters, and a shouting arose at the end of one of the streets which converged at this point. But his difficulty now was that he did not know which way of the five offered to him would lead him to his ships.

"The man who doubts must act," he remarked to himself grimly.

So he picked up his battered shield, and with naked sword in hand, struck off into the first alley on his left, taking this direction because it was opposite to that in which Isaac had been heading and he was convinced that the eunuch had led him away from the harbor to a quarter where he might not expect aid.

Indeed, in his present mood he suspected all Greeks, and his first concern was to escape whatever attention was directed toward the shambles under the cresset at the five-way crossing. He ran until the uproar attending his flight was drowned in the subdued hum of the city's monstrous hive. And then he realized that he was hopelessly lost.

ON THE sea or in the open Swain would have been in no doubt how to set a course. In this human warren, however, the stars meant as little to him as the tangle of streets. But there was one sense which served him in good stead, and set him finally upon his true path.

He was standing by a fountain in a little square when a puff of wind crept between the house-walls, and his nose sniffed it with interest. For that wind was burdened with the dank, moisty smell that hangs around docks and ship-landings.

Swain grunted his satisfaction.

"Where that wind comes from I shall find the ships," he muttered.

And without more loss of time he started to track down the wind's lair, and came at last to the barrier of the harbor walls, beyond which he could hear the suck and pull of the tide, the creakings of ships at their moorings, the groaning of hulls against the pilings, the moaning of cordage as the wind plucked at it, and best of all, smell the damp, salt smell of the sea.

Yet his next task was as difficult as any he had so far faced: how should he pass the wall?

His first thought, of course, was to use a gate, but investigation of the nearest one disclosed a half-dozen Greek men-at-arms gambling in the guard-room and a sentinel on duty outside. The gate, itself, was barred fast. Reluctantly, Swain turned away. He dared not trust the Greeks, and he was afraid that even if he was able to force a passage the noise of the fighting would attract reinforcements for the guards, who might pursue and overcome him.

So he left the gate, and wandered along the foot of the wall as far as a ramp of masonry designed for the dragging up and down of siege-engines. He climbed this, as much as anything else, to secure his bearings and discover how near he was to the wharf where his ships were berthed. But he forgot his purpose when he glimpsed the gaunt skeleton of a huge catapult lifting its lean casting-arm over the battlements.

To save the strain upon the ropes which wound the arm back for the discharge, it had been raised in this position and propped across the machicolations, while the ropes lay in loose coils about the winding-drum. Swain chuckled faintly as he peered over the edge of the wall at the muddy street which skirted its outer base.

"I have heard much of the catapults of Mikligard," he said; "but I never thought to use one thus."

He stripped the rope from the drum, knotted one end around the casting-arm of the engine, tested it, slung his shield on his back, slid over the battlements and went down hand over hand with the cool-headed ease of the man bred to the sea. In the time it takes to busk on mail he was safe outside the walls and hurrying toward a clump of masts which he recognized for those of his fleet.

From the shore the Northmen's ships seemed wrapped in slumber. Not a man stirred; not a spear-point gleamed. Yet Swain had scarce set foot on the wharf when a voice challenged him.

"Stand!" he was bidden in Norse.

"Who are you?" asked a voice in the Vallska speech, which he identified as Armod's.

"Is that you, Eindridi?" called Erling.

Swain smothered his amazement.

"It is I, Swain," he answered. "Why do you ask of Eindridi? Why are you on guard?"

A short, bow-legged figure waddled up to him ahead of a group of tall shapes.

"When two chiefs out of three are detained in the palace, it is wise for the common men to look to their arms," rumbled Erik Skallagrim's son.

"For your vigilance I have only praise," conceded Swain. "But I do not understand what you say of Eindridi. Is he not here?"

"Not unless Olvir Rosta is," answered Erik dryly.

"Did he——"

There was an edge to Swain's voice which drew a quick rejoinder from Erling.

"No, no, do not be hasty, Swain. We say naught against Eindridi. At the feasting Olvir came in to the hall with others of the Varangs, and when Eindridi would have turned from him Olvir came forward, with a noble manner, as becomes a warrior, and said that if there was misunderstanding betwixt them he desired it should be settled amicably, and to that end he would agree to any composition which Eindridi deemed fair."

"And what said Eindridi?" asked Swain bitterly.

"Why, after some backing and filling he consented to be led away by Olvir——"

"And one of those foul birds that wear woman's gear and no hair on their faces," put in Erik.

"The head fiend of them all," added Oddi the Little, who, with Armod, had joined the group.

"Nicephorus!" said Swain. "*Humph,* this begins to grow clear to me."

"What grows clear?" asked Erling.

"Why I have just made raven's meat out of seven of Nicephorus' folk—if folk they be."

"Ho," said Armod. "Alone? That was a deed to sing of, Swain."

"But is there war upon us?" demanded Erling, surprized.

"War!" jeered Erik harshly. "When men seek to slay and are slain? I know no other word for it. Best muster the men, Swain, and seize what booty we can and be off."

"No," answered Swain. "I am no man to flee shadows. Also, it is in my mind that the Emperor Manuel knows naught of this."

"He fooled you," snapped Erik.

"Not he, little man," rejoined Swain. "The man does not live can fool me. He is a warrior, that emperor. It would be well if we had his like in Norway. He could have had me slain any time this night had he sought to, for we were alone together in his chamber. No, no, this plotting is none of his doing. I feel the black heart of Olvir beating through all that has happened."

"And what are we to do?" asked Erling. "Here has been an attack upon you, and Eindridi is seduced from us."

"Be not so despondent about Eindridi," advised Swain.

"Bah," said Erik. "The last man who has his ear gives him his opinions."

"Exactly," agreed Swain. "And he will soon return to us. Olvir is a clever foe, as I have often said. If he had been easy to overcome I should not have been obliged to follow him to Mikligard. It is like him to try to weaken Eindridi's bonds with us, knowing Eindridi as he does. But I know Eindridi, too, and beneath his silken tunic and gilded mail he has a warrior's soul. Leave him to me—and to the emperor."

"What pleases you pleases me, Swain," replied Erling simply.

"Oh, aye," growled Erik as dourly as Swain, himself. "And I say the same. We grow used to trusting in you, Swain—but see that you do not suffer us to trust too often."

"What said the emperor, Swain?" asked Armod eagerly. "Will he stand your friend in the matter?"

"Yes and no," said Swain. "Here we must use our wits. And as I propose to do that, I wish first to outline to you two skalds your parts in a plan I have formed. My advice to you, Erling, is to sleep. Let Erik keep watch and rouse us when Eindridi returns."

But it was long before Swain slept, and after he lay down in the poop of *Deathbringer* Armod and Oddi climbed out upon the wharf and chuckled vastly together and smote each other's backs and acted as became men who enjoyed a joke in common. But they shared it with nobody else, although they did not sleep at all.

CHAPTER XII

OF HOW THE EMPEROR BORE HIMSELF TOWARD SWAIN AND OLVIR, AND OF THE SKALDCRAFT OF ARMOD AND ODDI

MORNING brought no sign of Eindridi, so Swain gathered Erling, Erik and the two skalds, summoned one of *Seamaiden's* crew who was familiar with Mikligard, and with this company went up into the city. The guards at the palace gate admitted them as before, and they were escorted again to the Hall of the Sea-shells, where the emperor was receiving bearers of tribute from Bolgaraland.* Manuel's face lighted as Swain appeared in the doorway, with his ruddy beard flowing over the mailcoat which was still splashed with the blood of the seven eunuchs.

"Greeting, Swain," he called. "You are come in a good hour. Stand here beside me with your folk."

But Swain's face remained stern.

"I am come here for justice, Emperor," he answered.

"For justice?" repeated the emperor. "Against whom?"

"My enemies."

Manuel frowned until his look became as stern as Swain's.

"We settled this matter yesterday," he said. "Will you forfeit my friendship?"

"Your friendship means nothing to me if it is friendship in name only," answered Swain. "You did not speak of permitting me to be assassinated by your own people."

"You speak in riddles," replied Manuel. "What is the meaning of this?"

"It is no riddle," denied Swain. "You sent me from you last night in company with one of those—" he pointed to several of the grotesque figures that hovered in the background— "Isaac was his name."

"That is true," agreed the emperor. "I bade him instruct the officer of the guard at the Great Gate to furnish you an escort."

Swain's grimness relaxed.

"Ho," said he. "That explains much. Also, Lord Emperor, it shows that your servants do not always obey you."

"You must be definite, Swain," commanded the emperor impatiently. "If my servants disobey me they suffer for it."

"Isaac and six more of his kind would have slain me," returned Swain simply.

"How? Where?"

The emperor turned to the high officers who surrounded him.

"Why was I not informed? Fetch them here!"

But there was a silence of bewilderment which Swain broke.

"Lord, they are not alive to be brought hither."

"Did you slay them? Alone?"

"Yes."

The emperor laughed.

"I think that was like you, Swain."

But his voice hardened at once.

"Yet I do not understand how it could have happened, and not reach my ears. Where did they beset you?"

Swain shrugged his shoulders.

"In the city, Lord. I know no more than that."

"But seven eunuchs slain, and I not informed!"

Manuel's face was red with anger.

"My lords, my lords," he cried to the great officers who shifted uncomfortably around him, "what have you to say to this?"

One after another mumbled his denial of knowledge of the incident, and a sneer twisted Swain's lips.

"I do not see—what do you call him?—the grand acolyte," he remarked.

"You shall," the emperor assured him grimly. "Bid the acolyte come to me immediately! Yet still I do not understand."

There was a *tap-tap* on the marble flooring, and Nicephorus minced out in front of the dais and prostrated himself before the emperor.

"Oh, mighty sovereign!" he shrilled. "Oh Christ-loving Emperor! Oh, Lord of Asia, Europe and the lands of the sea! Inheritor of Rome and——"

"Peace," snapped Manuel. "What have

---

* Bulgaria.

you to say? The Lord Swain has given me tidings which shall mean your punishment if you can not prove innocence of this foul crime."

Nicephorus beat his forehead upon the floor.

"Oh, Lord, I was this moment coming as fast as I might with the news which the watch officers carried from the Twelfth Legion. The corpses of Isaac and six more were found in front of a wine-tavern where they had been slain in a brawl, according to the word of the dwellers in the neighborhood."

"And you knew nothing of this affair until now?" demanded the emperor.

Nicephorus raised pink features which were convulsed with fear.

"How could I have known, Lord, when I supped late last night with the grand acolyte and his guests? There was much wine, and I—and I——"

The emperor's face twitched.

"I see," he said. "Ah, here is the grand acolyte! And Lord Eindridi! We will hear their stories?"

It was manifest to all the Northmen that their two countrymen had attended a protracted drinking-bout. Eindridi walked with a stagger, and even Olvir's mask of a face was grooved with weariness. But if Olvir had drunk deep the wine had not paralyzed his wits. He made obeisance before the throne, and answered Manuel respectfully:

"What stories, Lord? I have been as foolish as a youth, for in my joy at receiving back my old comrades, and notably, Eindridi Ungi, I drank last night as ill becomes the dignity you have conferred upon me."

The emperor was silent so long that the men in the hall began to shuffle their feet. His eyes switched from Olvir's face to Eindridi's and to Nicephorus's.

"So you drank together last night, you two?"

"Yes, Lord," assented Olvir. "And Nicephorus and others were of our company."

"Who were the others?"

Olvir named them slowly, all lords or officers of the court.

"I see," said the emperor. "And you say you had Nicephorus of your company?"

"Yes, Lord."

"How was that?"

Olvir hesitated as if unwilling to answer, but the emperor fixed him with a gaze which demanded obedience.

"Why, Lord," replied Olvir uneasily, "if you will not hold it against me, I was concerting with Nicephorus how best we could secure for Eindridi employment becoming his valor. For you will understand that since I now hold the place that was his I feel that I should do what I may to find him another."

"Another time prefer your request to me, and not to one of the eunuchs," retorted the emperor briefly.

He turned to Swain.

"Are you satisfied?"

"I must be."

Olvir stared at them with every semblance of bewilderment.

"Is it permitted to inquire what is wrong, Lord Emperor?" he asked.

"The Lord Swain was set upon last night."

"Not by men of mine," cried Olvir quickly, while Eindridi gaped at one and all, blurred of mind and uncertain what was toward.

"No, by seven eunuchs," replied Manuel.

Olvir straightened his shoulders.

"No man who knows me would believe that I would shelter my enmity behind eunuchs," he said proudly.

"You would use any tools, the viler the better," answered Swain.

But Olvir refused to lose his temper.

"You are my enemy, Swain," he returned. "And I am yours. It may be we shall be each other's deaths in the end. But all men know me for a fighter. And no matter what could be said about me, fair-minded folk will believe that I could have had naught to do with this deed, seeing that I was otherwise employed."

"Designedly, perhaps," sneered Swain.

"This dispute has gone far enough," intervened the emperor. "One of you is my man, the other my guest. You shall heed me, both."

"But by your favor, Lord, I would disprove Swain's charge," cried Olvir.

"How?"

"Thus. It was patent to all men last night that the Lord Swain had won your favor. The eunuchs are a jealous crew, and always intolerant of new influences in the court. What more likely than that Isaac decided to make away with him before he had an opportunity to rise to power?"

Swain laughed scornfully, but the emperor, used to the devious methods of palace intrigue, nodded his head.

"It is perhaps true. Nicephorus, I would have you investigate the circumstances among your people. And let all men know that whoever strikes at the Lord Swain strikes at me. If such a deed happens again, I will have crucified not only the guilty but the suspect.

"Swain, do you come with me, and those who attend you."

As on the preceding day, the heralds sounded their trumpets, the chamberlains advanced, the ranks of courtiers divided and the emperor and Swain, with Erling, Erik and the two skalds behind them, passed from the Hall of the Sea-shells into the corridor to the imperial apartments.

So soon as the door swung to at their backs the emperor's manner changed; he became a different man.

"Now, what of this fight last night, Swain?" he cried, clapping the Northman on the back. "I see you have fetched your skalds, as you promised, but I would sooner hear this last tale from your own lips. Seven against one! Those are great odds."

"I have faced greater," answered Swain. "An armored man should be able to slay seven who are not men, unarmored. Yet I will admit that I struck one or two blows I like to think upon."

"It was well done," returned the emperor. "Yes, and bravely done. But you shall not be called upon to resist assassins a second time in Mikligard."

"They are welcome to try," said Swain indifferently. "I am never loath to fight if my own hands are not tied."

"I have said that you shall not fight, and you shall not," rejoined the emperor. "Moreover, Swain, I consider you unreasonable if you persist in accusing Olvir of this crime."

"You do not know Olvir as well as I do," replied Swain. "Do you think the man who slew my old mother would stop at hiring eunuchs to slay me?"

The emperor brushed this question aside.

"What you say is of no moment," he insisted, "seeing that Olvir has proven he was otherwise occupied. Do you suspect Eindridi of complicity with him, too?"

"Eindridi is a fool, as you, yourself, have said," answered Swain. "In this case he is a tool. But I see clearly that there is no use of our arguing the matter further. Let us discuss something else."

"Yes, yes," Manuel assented eagerly. "Tell me how you slew the seven——"

But Swain shook his head vigorously.

"Not so, Lord, for that subject is concerned with my feud, and you will not hear of that. But here are Armod and Oddi with greater store of lays and sagas than any other two men in the Northlands. They will give you the diversion you seek."

They had come to the chamber overlooking the straits, and the emperor ran his eye over Swain's four followers as they stood inside the secret door in the panel.

"I would I might call myself lord of four such friends," he exclaimed with kindling eye. "My friends, Swain, are all suitors for power.

"Well, it shall be as you say. I will forego last night's adventure. Instead, I will have the skalds recite your past deeds for me."

But Swain shook his head again.

"Not so, Lord," he denied a second time, "for my past deeds are all connected with my feud. That is the story of my life."

Manuel frowned.

"This is strange hearing, Swain. You are a man grown. Surely, you have performed deeds which had no connection with Olvir."

"All my life, since I slew my first man, I have pursued Olvir," returned Swain stubbornly. "But Armod and Oddi have many tales that are not concerned with me. Ho, Armod, recite for the emperor the 'Life of Grettir the Outlaw!' "

The tall skald bowed low before Manuel.

"With your permission, Lord," he said.

Manuel dropped into a chair, and pointed the others to seats.

"It is a violation of court etiquette for you to sit," he said sulkily; "but there are no chamberlains or patricians by to have their feelings hurt. My permission, skald? You have it, but I warn you I have turned fault-finding."

Armod tossed back the long hair from his eyes, smiling.

"Lord," he answered in his ringing voice that could master the clamor of battle and the bellow of the tempest, "it is true that there is much in a king's life to make him fault-finding, but no king ever suffered so many sorrows or risked so many perils as Grettir, who——"

Gradually, as Armod's tale unfolded, the sulky look faded from the emperor's face; his eyes became fastened upon the skald's expressive features; his hand unconsciously beat time to the rhythm of the saga. The water-clock on its table emptied, refilled, emptied again; but the emperor listened on. And when Armod finished with the story of Grettir's end the emperor was sitting forward on the edge of his chair, breathing fast.

"Do you know many tales like that, skald?" he exclaimed.

"A few, Lord—as does Oddi, likewise," replied Armod.

Manuel turned to the little skald.

"Then it is your turn, Oddi," he said. "But stay! I am forgetting the laws of hospitality. It is midday, and you must eat. Afterward you shall have your turn."

And it is the bare truth that the emperor kept Oddi the whole afternoon, reciting and chanting the lays which tell of the Jomsborg Vikings, and of Olaf Tryggva's son, and of the wanderings of Harald the Tyrant.

"Brave tales!" he cried. "But they whet my curiosity the more to hear of your exploits, Swain."

"No, Lord, that is forbidden us," answered Swain.

"Well, well, perhaps it is best as you say," admitted Manuel. "At the least, I find rare entertainment in these ventures of men long dead and gone. You must come tomorrow and tell me more, skalds. It was my intention to take you and all your company, Swain, to see the chariot races in the Hippodrome; but we can see races any time, and I would first prefer to hear the tale of Njal of Iceland, and his burning and what came of it, which Armod spoke of while we sat at wine."

"It is the will of the skalds to please you, Lord," responded Swain. "And now, since it is late, may we return to our ships in safety?"

The emperor flushed.

"I will summon the Drungary of the Watch," he said. "Your safety shall rest on his responsibility."

* * *

SO SWAIN and his comrades were escorted to their ships by the Drungary of the Watch, who was the officer in command of the city troops, and a guard of two centuries of foot and a century of horse. And as the procession moved through the streets in the twilight the citizens called, one to another, asking who it was that passed by in such state, and the wise ones bobbed their heads and said:

"It is the Lord Swain, the Varang who has captured the Emperor's interest. Watch him, friends, for he will rise high."

But little they knew Swain.

When the Northmen reached the wharf where the long-ships lay they saw Eindridi upon the poop of *Seamaiden*, but Swain walked past without speaking to him and went instead aboard Erling's ship.

"Are you unfriendly to Eindridi, Swain?" inquired Erling.

"Not I," returned Swain, "but I prefer to let him take the first step between us."

"He has not treated you well," answered Erling. "And for that matter, I have complaint against him, myself."

"Will you be angered against the thistle that the wind blows in your face?" retorted Swain. "Be patient, Erling, Eindridi will come to us."

And even as he predicted, so it happened. They were sitting at the evening meal in Erling's cabin, and Erik beside them, when the leather curtain was pushed aside and Eindridi thrust in his head.

"Am I excluded from your company?" he asked indignantly.

"No, no," cried Swain. "Come in! Come in! We thought you were otherwise engaged, Eindridi. You did not come back to us last night, remember."

Eindridi squatted down on the deck, and it was plainly seen by the others that he was unable to understand Swain's bluff friendliness. He had been prepared to encounter accusations and to defend himself accordingly.

"Yes," he assented. "I was concerned last night for those men I induced to accompany me to Mikligard by promising them employment in the ranks of the Varangs. It seemed best that I should sink my own feelings, and do what I could for them with Olvir."

"Ah," said Swain, "and did you find Olvir willing to care for them?"

Eindridi cast a suspicious glance at him.

"I did," he said. "Olvir may be your enemy, Swain, but I have found him reasonable and willing to stand my friend."

"Of course," agreed Swain, "even to accepting your office—lest it should go to one who was not your friend, no doubt."

"Touching that matter, he assured me he might not help himself," returned Eindridi. "The emperor was bound to give it to him, for fear the eunuchs should intrigue it for another."

"That is a very honorable way for you to regard your situation," said Swain, "especially as you are now in a strange land without employment."

"Ah, but you do not understand," cried Eindridi. "Olvir has promised to see that I have another place. He and Niephorus, the chief of the eunuchs, can secure me the post of turmarch on the Slavic march."

"And what is a turmarch?" demanded Swain.

"The commander of a division of troops."

"Is he as important as a strategos?"

"Why, no. A strategos is commander of a theme, a county. He has several turmarchs under his orders."

"And so Olvir is to make you a turmarch?" pursued Swain.

"Yes," assented Eindridi, puzzled.

"It is evident, then, that he has a small idea of your importance," declared Swain. "For I heard it said last night that you were to have the post of strategos of the Bukellarain Theme."

Eindridi stared at him in utter confoundment.

"Strategos of the Bukellarian Theme! But how? Only the emperor——"

"He promised it to you," replied Swain.

Surprize, flattered vanity, lingering doubt, gratitude, resentment, all struggled for expression in Eindridi's face.

"Did he so in truth?" he exclaimed.

"He did," said Swain. "You are my friend, Eindridi, and I told the emperor that I resented deeply the treatment which was accorded you in Mikligard while you were absent. He agreed with me; but Olvir brought so much influence to bear upon him that he was constrained to unseat you. Now he regrets it and has consented to give you the office I mentioned."

Eindridi beamed.

"You are, indeed, a true friend, Swain," he cried. "As for Olvir——"

He twirled his mustaches and bent his eyebrows fiercely together.

"As for him, he is a smooth-tongued snake. It is as I suspected all along; he is a tool of the eunuchs. Nicephorus is his friend, and that is enough for me. I am no man to have eunuchs to my dinner-table and to take wine with my friends. Not I! But let them beware, Swain. It is obvious the emperor has thought better of his mistake, and I shall soon be back in favor."

"It is common talk," Swain assured him gravely.

"And then," pursued Eindridi, "I shall remember those who befriended me, and especially, you, Swain."

"I shall be grateful," said Swain. "Are you disposed to keep your pledge that you would be my man and stand by me in my fight with Olvir?"

"I have never had any other purpose," protested Eindridi.

"*Humph,*" growled Swain. "Did it not seem strange to you last night that Olvir made Nicephorus of your company?"

"Why?" returned Eindridi. "To secure anything in the palace you must have the eunuchs with you."

"That is to be seen," said Swain. "How many of his own men has Olvir with him in the guard?"

"Perhaps two hundred. But the emperor would never——"

"Whatever I do, the emperor will approve of it," said Swain. "Even to the naming of you strategos, Eindridi."

CHAPTER XIII

OF HOW THE FACTIONS OF MIKLIGARD HELD CHARIOT-RACES IN THE HIPPODROME BEFORE THE EMPEROR AND SWAIN

FOR the passage of a week the emperor feasted privately with Swain and his comrades, and listened daily to the rich store of sagas and lays which Armod and Oddi knew. By times they spent the daylight hours together, and again it might be that they caroused an evening at the wine-cup, for in the emperor's palace were wines such as the Northmen had never dreamed of tasting, so exquisite was the fragrance of them, so heady their strength. But at all times the emperor was voracious for the entertainment of the skalds, and oft and oft he pressed them for the episodes of Swain's past which were become part and parcel of the storied lore of the Northland. But never would Swain suffer that the talk should turn long in that direction.

"If the skalds sing of my life, they sing of my feud," he would say.

"Alas, that you and Olvir should be in Mikligard at one and the same time," the emperor would reply. "It is ill fortune for me, for these tales of Viking warfare have given me a hunger to know how you rose to power, Swain."

"I rose by fighting and wit, as do all men," answered Swain briefly.

"Ah, but all men do not rise," returned the emperor. "I would I could see two shield-walls crash or dragon rend dragon, as in the lays that Armod and Oddi sing."

"They are sights once seen never forgotten," rejoined Swain; "but we are far south for such strivings."

It chanced that at the end of the week there occurred one of the festival days of the Greeks, and on this day the emperor bade Swain and all his folk to attend the sports in the Hippodrome. The common men were placed in seats apportioned to the troop of the garrison, but Swain and his chiefs and the two skalds accompanied the emperor to the palace of the Kathisma, which overlooked the northern extremity of the arena and contained the seats for the emperor and the nobles and officers of the court.

Erling and Eindridi and the skalds were given seats in the space reserved for the courtiers in the colonnaded front of the Kathisma; but Swain the emperor carried with him to the imperial throne, which stood a story higher upon a platform supported by twenty-four marble pillars, shadowed by a canopy borne up on braced lances. In front of this platform a flight of steps descended to the Pi, a lower platform where were grouped the standards of the imperial guards and a suitable escort. Beyond this stretched the sanded extent of the arena, fourteen hundred feet in length and four hundred feet wide, shining with marble and crammed with statuary, and terminating opposite the Kathisma in a rounded bank of seats called the Sphendone.

The seats sloped up from the boundary wall of the arena in dazzling zigzags of marble. Half-way up there was an open promenade, adorned with statues and drinking-fountains, called the Bouleutikon. At the top, circling the eastern, southern and western walls, was a second promenade, more richly ornamented than the Bouleutikon, three thousand feet in length. Over the seats in the eastern and western sections stretched vast awnings, but the marble banks in the Sphendome, assigned to the lowest order of people, were unsheltered.

The arena, itself, was divided up and down the center by the Spina, a smooth and level wall, four feet high and six hundred and seven feet long, placed equidistant between the eastern and western banks of seats, its top crowned by a myriad statues of emperors, empresses, jugglers, horse-boys, bear-tamers, chariot-racers, dwarfs and celebrities, famous and infamous—as, indeed, was every available foot of space throughout the whole gigantic structure. Wherever Swain cast his eye he saw either people, eighty thousand of them, stacked up to right and left of him in two contrasting heaps of blue and green, or stone representations of people and animals.

Stoical as he was, his face was blank as he surveyed the oddities that demanded attention on every hand. First and foremost, atop of the Sphendone directly opposite the Imperial platform, towered an enormous figure of a woman, who upheld on one hand a second statue, more than life-size, of an armed horseman. A pillar on the Spina was crowned by a second woman, who seemed to be stepping off into the air. The ball of one foot rested lightly on the pillar; the other foot was free; behind her floated the narrow girdle that was her only adornment. And as Swain watched she swayed from side to side, according to how the wind eddied down over the walls of the Hippodrome.

These and other marvels he glimpsed in the first moment in which he stepped forth behind the emperor upon the Imperial platform. The next instant the statues slipped from his mind as eighty thousand voices spoke as one. What a roar! The awnings over the Bouleutikon bellied upward, and the marble walls echoed and reechoed the shout!

"Manuel lives!" "Health to the Emperor!" "Christ guard the King of Rome!" "Prosperity to God's regent!"

The imperial guards on the Pi elevated their standards, whereon the eagle of old Rome was combined with the Cross of Christ; and Manuel, stepping forward from his throne, signed the Cross in the air, once, twice and thrice, to the right, to the left and in front of him.

Again the assemblage roared, and the emperor sank back upon the throne.

"Well, what think you of this place?" he asked of Swain, standing mute beside him.

"It is greater than any building I ever saw," acknowledged Swain; "but it seems to me that it is put to a foolish use."

The emperor made a sign to an officer who had taken a position at the railing of the Pi, a short truncheon in his hand.

"There," said Manuel. "The director of the games has his authority to begin. Wait until you see what he produces before you judge our institutions, Swain."

"Perhaps you are right," agreed Swain.

A bedlam of yelping broke out beneath them, and a horde of quaint folk poured forth from the Mangana, or ground floor of the Kathisma, where were the dressing-rooms, stables and magazines for the participants in the games.

SWAIN surveyed the prancing, posturing mob of dwarfs, acrobats and antics with a sour face as they ran over the sand and divided into two groups, one performing in the Stama, the part of the arena at the northern end situated between the Mangana and the Spina, and the second in the similar area between the Sphendone and the Spina.

"Why have a building like this for such foolish purposes?" he exclaimed. "No, Lord, I think there was justice in what I first said."

The emperor propped his chin on one fist and gloomed over the giddy scene.

"It may be you are right," he said, half-resentfully. "The Hippodrome was not always so tame, Swain. In the old days men slew each other out there for sport, and the sands ran red. They matched men against men, and men against animals, and animals against each other. Then you might see how the Nubians and Berbers of Africa conducted themselves in fighting the Slavs of the North, and pitch the Armenian and Persian in opposition to the Greek or the Italian. You might study how the elephant and the lion are done to death by men who make their hunting a life-work. Oh, beyond doubt, Swain, this place was better used in the old days."

"It is the truth," answered Swain. "This business turns my stomach. Look! There is a fellow with a dancing bear, who must keep a muzzle on his pet!"

"It is tame sport for warriors," assented the emperor, yawning. "Tame for men who lead the life of your land. There men think little of life and death, and all of honor—as they do, too, in the Frankish lands, these days."

He kindled with enthusiasm.

"Ha, Swain, what would it be like to see mailed horsemen riding, lance to lance down there, eh! Can you hear the clang of the smitten helms, and the chargers' scream?"

Swain's hands opened and closed.

"Yes, yes," he cried. "Or think of the meeting of two shield-walls! The place was made for fighting, Lord."

But the emperor shook his head, the enthusiasm gone from his face.

"You and I may think so, Swain; but after all, the Hippodrome is best suited for racing. Its name bears witness of its purpose."

"Yet you have just said that it once saw better sport. Bah, this is play for women!"

Manuel gloomed again.

"There is not a woman here. But it is the only sport Christians are supposed to enjoy these days. I would give my right arm to set the nobles to the fashion of tilting as the lords of Jerusalem and Cyprus practise it! It would make better warriors of them."

"It would," assented Swain—and there was a curious gleam, now, in his hard blue eyes.

The emperor stared out over the shifting play of figures on the sands, men who juggled and did tricks or cavorted with tame animals.

"Bah!" he rasped. "Enough of this."

And he extended his arm toward the director of the games, who promptly cast down his truncheon.

It was as if a bolt had been shot from the sky. The merrymaking stopped short; folk and animals trooped back the way they had come and vanished into the cavernous depths of the Mangana.

The stands seemed to be mildly puzzled by the abrupt conclusion of the preliminary sports, but almost at once men with ivory and wax tablets began to run back and forth between the rows shouting names and numbers, and other men took up their cries and shouted answers, and finally the people on the two sides of the arena commenced to shout to each other across its sand, sometimes with taunts and fierce gestures.

Swain looked hopeful.

"Some of these folk have spirit," he remarked. "Will they come to blows?"

The emperor laughed, the first real show of mirth he had made.

"Not they, Swain. That is only the eternal bickering of the Blues and the Greens."

"And who are the Blues and the Greens?" asked Swain.

The emperor pointed to the contrasting banks of color, blue on his right, green on his left.

"They are the factions," he answered.

"And what purpose do they serve?" demanded Swain. "What does it mean to be a Blue or a Green?"

But Manuel shook his head hopelessly.

"Who can say, Swain? Some men hold that the Blues are the conservative faction in the city and the Greens the voice of the poorer orders and those who complain against the existing order. And it may been so in the old days, but now they are of both kinds. They bet upon the chariots of their colors, and brawl in the streets. That is all."

"More child's play," sneered Swain. "It is as if bower-maidens quarreled over the spinning-wheel."

"True," agreed the emperor; "but it was not always so, Swain. More than one emperor has been given notice of his doom by the factions here in the Hippodrome."

"Why do they not hold a Thing, and do the deed as it should be done?" growled Swain. "I like not this mixing of jugglery with state."

There was a brisk stamping and clatter below them, and the director of the games bent his gaze upon the emperor. Manuel nodded slightly, and down came the truncheon; and away off on a little platform in front of the Spina a man suddenly dropped a square of white cloth.

Hoofs jarred on the stones, spattered the sand; wheels whirred and ground; whips cracked; drivers shouted—and out from the gateways of the Mangana sprang twelve four-horsed chariots abreast, blue and green, all intermingled and confused.

The stands went mad. Men leaped to their feet upon the marble benches, and started to run along the promenades in useless endeavor to keep up with the swaying chariots. The betting agents increased their clamor. The drivers leaned forward, with swinging lashes and loosened reins. Faster and faster went the pace. Louder and louder rose the tumult, on one side of the arena a frenzied mass of blue, on the other a sloping pile of green in vivid motion. The emperor, too, succumbed to the hysteria; but Swain, knitting his brows slightly, assumed a grin of derision.

"What?" cried Manuel, perceiving his expression. "It does not grip you, Swain?"

"It is well enough, Lord," answered Swain, tolerantly; "but of what significance is it whether one chariot wins or another?"

The emperor stared at him an instant, then burst into laughter.

"Why, naught, but that some men will be ruined in their pockets, and others enriched."

"All because four horses ran faster than forty-four others!" commented Swain. "It is fair sport, but no more—and the horses would run faster without the chariots."

"But it does not require so much skill to ride a horse as to guide four yoked to a chariot," protested Manuel.

"It takes little skill," rejoined Swain. "If one man must control four horses from the backs of two of them, say, that would be different. It would be dangerous. This—it is boy's work."

"Bide," the emperor advised him. "Watch them take the turn yonder. This is not so simple as it looks at first sight, Swain."

The chariots surged up to the far turn, half-obscured by the clouds of sand from churning hoofs. There appeared to be little to choose between them, but as they rounded the Spina and came into view again Swain saw that three were out in front of the others, one driven by a man in a Blue tunic, the others by Greens. One of the Greens led, another Green was second, the Blue was third.

From both stands came howls of appeal and denunciation, which the contending drivers ignored. All three men were leaning out across the backs of their horses, urging and lashing them on. All three teams were stretched, bellies to earth, tails streaming behind, chariot-wheels bounding in air. Near and nearer they came, and the lone Blue rapidly overcame the lead of the second Green. Presently he passed into second place, and the Blue stands rose up to cheer him; but their cheers ended in a wail. For the two Greens promptly swung together, the second one whipping up his horses to overtake the Blue, and boxed him between them. And the Blue, with Green wheel-hubs threatening his chariot on either hand, pulled in his team and dropped back into the ruck of hopelessly beaten contestants.

It was Swain's turn to laugh. The emperor scowled at the arena from under close-drawn brows, too deeply enraged for speech.

"Well, Lord, what did I say?" jeered Swain. "Is this a sport for men?"

"Swain," gasped the emperor, choking on his wrath, "no man but you could say that, and live."

"I am not a man to threaten," replied Swain very gently. "Also, you know what I have said to be the truth."

Manuel groaned.

"It is. May the Forerunner hear me, but I am ashamed of my people! This comes of nurturing them mildly. Our wars are all distant on the marches, and these folk of the city never see an enemy except in chains. Ah, if I might only shock them into understanding of what a man's honor demands!"

Cold fire burned in Swain's blue eyes, yet his answer was studiously moderate.

"It is bad when any folk forget the hardships of life, Lord. To sit on stone benches and laugh at men who twist themselves in knots or make a muzzled bear prance, to shout on horses other men drive, that is no way to encourage a folk to make war bravely. But different lands have different customs, and I am a Northman who knows little of you Greeks."

"I would that more of my men were like you, Swain," answered the emperor. "No more of this! Let us return to the palace, and try if Armod and Oddi can make me forget that craven fool down there—for a brass denarius I would order him to the rowing-bench of a trireme! But no. He is no worse than his fellows. I have seen them all yield to the same trick, in craven fear of death under the horses' hoofs, and until today, Swain—I say it with all shame—I never saw how cowardly it was.

"No, no, I can not punish him; but we must see if we can not put heart into these drivers to dare death rather than accept defeat."

"You can not make heroes with words," said Swain.

Manuel gave him a startled look.

"With what, then? Deeds? But how school eighty thousand soft-living men, who dwell behind walls that have never been forced?"

"That is your task, Lord," replied Swain with a shrug.

Nevertheless, when he had opportunity a few moments later to rejoin his companions he drew Armod and Oddi aside.

"He is ready for you, now," he said.

Armod's face brightened, and Oddi caught Swain's hand.

"I knew it," cried the little skald. "There is white magic in good skaldcraft, Swain."

"We have not succeeded yet," warned Swain.

"If we have gone so far I do not think that we shall fail," answered Armod.

"Yes, yes," said Oddi. "When force fails, wit wins."

"Humph," growled Swain. "And if words can not make heroes, yet it may be that they can achieve the impossible."

"Words are thoughts, Swain," replied Armod. "And thoughts are more powerful than force."

Swain snorted disdainfully.

"For a skald, you are a wise man, Armod," he said, "but what you say is foolish. Thoughts are of no avail unless you combine them with force. By strength and wit a man gains success."

CHAPTER XIV

OF THE WHITE MAGIC THAT IS IN SKALDCRAFT, AND OF WHAT CAME OF SWAIN'S USE OF IT.

THE emperor pushed away his golden cup.

"Even the wine tastes bitter," he exclaimed. "What, Swain? Do you never drink? Day by day I have seen the cup filled at your place, and always it remains unemptied."

"I am no friend to wine and ale," returned Swain briefly. "Water is my drink."

Oddi, farther down the table, leaned forward in his chair.

"Men say it was over your water-drinking you had the quarrel with Swain Briostreip—breaststrap—which first drew attention to you, Swain," he said.

"That was a small business," replied Swain.

"Ha, then, here is a fight of yours which had naught to do with Olvir Rosta," cried the emperor.

"And there you are at fault, Lord," retorted Swain. "For I clashed with Swain Briostreip over the question which of us hurled the stone which defeated the attempt of Olivir and his grandmother, Witch Frakork, to overthrow Jarl Paul in the Orkneys. My stone caught Olvir in the chest and knocked him into the sea, but his men dragged him out."

Armod, opposite Oddi, struck into the conversation.

"I have heard that was the second time Olvir escaped death at your hands, Swain," he said. "Or so the skalds have it."

"It is true," admitted Swain shortly. "But we were speaking of the slaying of Swain Briostreip."

"Yes," spoke up the emperor. "And I do not understand you when you say that you quarreled with Swain Briostreip over your water-drinking, but that you clashed with him because of what the twain of you did in a fight against Olvir Rosta."

"We fell out concerning the matter of the stone," explained Swain. "But Swain Briostreip fastened a quarrel upon me because I drank water at Jarl Paul's Yule feast."

"I have made a lay of that," remarked Oddi, playing with the golden cup at his elbow. "Swain Briostreip was Jarl Paul's forecastle-man and a tried warrior, and you a stripling. Jarl Paul was so angered at his death that he outlawed you, which was the beginning of your efforts to unseat him and put Jarl Rognvald in his place. It is a brave story, Swain."

"It is saga meat," agreed Armod.

The emperor looked from one to the other of them, as if weighing somewhat in his mind.

"I have a load of disgrace upon me for the miserable showing my people made in the Hippodrome," he said. "I pray you, skalds, divert my thoughts with an account of Swain's adventures."

Armod looked to Oddi and both looked to Swain.

"But I have told you, Lord Emperor," said Swain, "that the story of my life is the story of my——"

"I know, I know!" rejoined Manuel impatiently. "I have heard that speech from you a hundred times. So far as Olvir is concerned, my mind is open. Whatever you or these friends of yours can say will move me little against him, for I am a man who has hated, and who knows the potency of hate. All my life I have weighed what men say of themselves and of others, and it will go hard if trouble is bred from a tale which has you for hero and Olvir for villain. He is a warrior, a man of the sword, no puling monk, —— knows! The best thing to be said for him is that you are his enemy, and that after a lifetime of enmity he is here in the city with us. No ordinary man could have defied you all these years, and lived, Swain."

"I was never one to decry Olvir's craft," rejoined Swain grimly. "He is a great warrior."

"So be it," cried the emperor. "What you say is just. I do not hold it against you for hating your enemy. Nor should I stand in the way of your efforts to slay him outside my realm. That being so, I see no reason why Armod and Oddi should not divert me with the saga of your exploits. You are the best man of your hands I have ever met. Of all the Frankish chiefs who have visited me not one could handle my spear or stand up to me with blunted swords, as you have done."

Swain sat back in his chair like a man who has said his last word.

"If you will have it, you will have it, Lord. I am no man to take joy from the praises of others, so I make only the condition that Armod and Oddi shall tell all. Let them begin at the beginning. Let them relate whatever of discredit they know against me—or that which certain folk account to be discreditable to me. And let them carry on the tale to the end."

The emperor refilled his wine-cup and drained it at a draught.

"I am content," he agreed. "Ha, the wine has a different savor already. Begin, skalds, begin."

Armod and Oddi exchanged glances.

"If it pleases the Emperor," said the little skald, "I will make a beginning, seeing that I have composed certain verses celebrating Swain's youth, namely, his first meeting with Olvir and Frakork, and how Olvir slew his father and Valthiof his brother in Dungelsbaeskalli, as also how Swain slew Swain Briostreip and what came of that. And if it further pleases the Emperor, I can add a lay I have written touching the battle with the two Jarls off Skalpeid and other verses on the burning of Frakork."

Manuel stripped a massy gold chain from his neck and tossed it down the table.

"Excellent promise," he answered, smiling. "Here is an earnest of the reward you shall have, Oddi. But if so much falls to your portion, what will there be left for Armod to tell?"

"There is sufficient for me, Lord," replied Armod. "My share shall be the lay of Swain's wooing, and the tale of Asleif's end—she who was his mother and whom Olvir slew; and the Saga of Swain Jarlmaker. If you are still hungry for more——"

"By the ——!" swore the emperor. "We shall sit out the night."

Swain said nothing, but his blue eyes sparked frostily, and his hands tugged at the ruddy strands of his beard.

Oddi stood up, his small body taut with emotion, as he launched into the prefatory introduction to his lay.

"In Dungelsbae in Caithness dwelt a man named Olaf, and he had three sons, Valthiof, Swain and Gunni, and a woman named Asleif to wife. Now, westward of him up the coast were farms that came by descent to Frakork Moddan's daughter, who was reputed a witch and had slain or crippled many men and some women by arts of enchantment and the aid of the powers of evil. And this woman, Frakork, called the Witch, was the last of her line, saving a grandson named Olvir, who was called Rosta, because of his quarrelsomeness. There was ill feeling of old time betwixt Frakork and Olaf of Dungelsbae, and it chanced on a certain day——"

AS ODDI warmed to his task he cast his spell not only upon the emperor, but upon Armod, who, with a skald's interest in a rival skald's craft, was close bent upon the means by which he exploited the tale, sometimes beating time to the rhythmical passages, anon clapping his hands softly in applause of some terse descriptive phrase or bit of trenchant dialog.

The emperor was heedless of the devices by which Oddi built up the narrative; his eyes were fastened upon the skald's face; his hands were clasped motionless in front of him, as Oddi sketched in verse and prose the meeting of Swain and Frakork and Olvir on a gray sea-beach, that first fight of one man against a dragon's crew, the echoes of which rang around the northern lands and which was to be the cause of the deaths of men then unborn, and the counter-raid upon Dungelsbae which was to seal the pledge of enmity between the two men.

Swain, alone, remained outside the mystic circle which Oddi wove around that table. Aloof, slightly cynical, he studied emperor and skalds with a vigilance which never became apparent.

On and on swept Oddi's tale. From Caithness it moved to the rocky isles of the Orkneyar. Now he painted the rough splendor of a Jarl's drinking-hall; now he showed the long-ships putting out to sea; now he presented the spectacle of a sea-fight, oars threshing and rattling, arrows hissing, spears whistling, swords, and axes clanging. He told of the duel between the two Swains in Orphir churchyard under the moon, of Swain's flight from an angry Jarl's wrath, of his viking ventures while an outlaw and the vengeance he took upon Jarl Paul by lending aid to Jarl Rognvald in securing possession of the Jarldom.

Headlong was the saga's pace. The skald's language became more fiery, touched with the fever of hatred and the blood-lust. He described how Swain had driven Olvir and Frakork from the Orkneys, and how afterward, in the depths of Winter, he had descended upon their new-built skalli afar within the Scots marches and put it to the torch. He described Olvir's ignominious flight, and the efforts of Frakork to trap Swain by an enchantment which his wit had baffled. He described the fury of the flames in which the witch had perished, and with her the secrets of her wickedness.

The skald's mood shifted. He described Jarl Rognvald's attempt to ignore his obligations to Swain, and with a vein of sly humor, broached the account of Swain's trick by which he divided the Jarl's power and ensured his own power and safety. He brought out Swain's constant pursuit of Olvir, the success of Olvir in winning a place in the counsels of your Jarl Harald, the intrigue these two started against Swain and how he fought it. And he ended on a note of triumph with the turgid bloodshed of Swain's fight against the two Jarls in the stormy darkness off Skalpeid.

"Brave! Brave!" cried the emperor. "Well done, skald. Ask of me what you will for reward. You shall have it.

"Well, what say you, Swain? Was he accurate?"

"He steered as close as any skald," answered Swain.

"I must hear more of this from you, yourself," exclaimed the emperor. "Holy ——, to think of escaping such foul enchantments! You must bear a mighty charm to have eluded death so successfully."

"I am at pains to do always that which my enemies do not expect," replied Swain. "But will you hear Armod, Lord? The night waxes late—and some of his lays travel the same ground as Oddi's."

"Who thinks of sleep when deeds of valor are to be sung?" retorted Manuel. "I would not miss this for my throne, itself. On, Armod! Here is my signet-ring; do you as well as Oddi, and I will redeem it at your own price!"

Armod rose, his lean figure instinct with a fire which sharpened the words that poured melodiously from his tongue.

He spoke first, with a touch of satire, of Swain's wooing of Ingrid, Queen of Man, of their marriage, of the birth of their sons, of Ingrid's growing hatred of her husband and how she tried to betray him to Olvir and of the vengeance Swain took upon her after Olvir had escaped him. Next, Armod turned to the fighting in the North when Olvir attempted to reestablish himself in the Orkneyar, the rush and stamp of battle by land, the forays of the long-ships at sea, and the trick by which Olvir succeeded in driving into Swain's skalli on Gairsey and the doom he meted out there to Asleif because she would not tell him where she had hidden Swain's sons.

All the virile power of Armod's art went into the making of this picture. He reproduced the simple life of the stead in the early morning, the farm folk going about their duties, the children brawling in the yard. He spoke of the alarm when a strange keel grounded on the shingle beach, the hostile outcries and bloodied steel, the torches in the thatch, death by the wayside and on the hearth-stone. He described how Asleif had hidden the children in an empty ale-butt, how Olvir had tortured the servants unsuccessfully to find where they were concealed and finally had turned upon their grandmother.

And as he described how Olvir had first taunted Asleif and then hewed off her gray head, the emperor's hand rapped on the table-top and an involuntary cry escaped his lips.

"Foul! Oh, foul!"

Armod hesitated, looked to Swain and obeyed the silent command in his chief's face to continue. His voice pealed like a hammer on steel as he recited Olvir's flight before Swain's wrath, the pursuit that had driven the outlaw to the uttermost ends of the earth, to the wild mountains of Iceland, the far shores of that mysterious land beyond the Western Ocean which Leif Eric's son had visited generations past, to the marshes of Gardariki*. He told of battles in many lands, with mailed Northmen, with tall Slavs, with the black folk who live far south of Serkland, with the strange red men of the West.

Revenge was his object, battle his occupation, wherever Swain voyaged. Kings and Jarls appeared and disappeared, according to their ability to help or hinder Swain's quest. The affairs of the Orkneyar hinged upon Swain's will; Jarls came and went and died and succeeded, but Swain remained, too powerful for any of them to break to harness, a friend to those who aided him, a merciless enemy to any who resisted his purposes. And so Armod concluded, in his turn, upon a plane of triumph, depicting Swain as setting forth from the Orkneyar on this voyage which was to carry him to Bjorgvin and Mikligard and the lands between.

" 'I have done what a man may in life,' said Swain, 'saving one thing: I have not slain my enemy. Wealth I have taken; power I have won; sons I have got. For me henceforth there is the one purpose. Where Olvir Rosta is, there shall my keels furrow their way.' And so he went down to his ship, and the rest you already know, Lord Emperor. Skoal!"

Silence mantled the room. Outside the windows the Bosphorus slapped at the palace walls. Around the men at the table the darkness was rapidly conquering the flickering lamps.

Armod sank wearily into his seat, fingering the emperor's signet, and Oddi reached out a generous hand to clasp his friend's. Swain sat watchfully, eyes glued upon the emperor, who gazed straight ahead of him, mind still concentrated upon the pictures which Armod's white magic had evoked for him. Once Swain opened his mouth, but he shut it again; and the emperor spoke first.

"An honorable story, Swain! Of all the tales these skalds have told yours is the greatest. All my life I have ruled this empire, but I have not done as much as you in your frozen North."

"A man lives his life as he must," returned Swain sententiously.

"Ah, but not all men live like heroes! Here are you and Olvir Rosta. With you I would exchange lots this night if I could. I would rather be fat Nicephorus than Olvir."

"You do not consider me unreasonable in my hatred of Olvir, now?" remarked Swain.

Manuel fidgeted in his chair, poured out a cup of wine, drank it and refilled it.

---

* Russia.

"No," he burst out suddenly. "By the ——, no! I am weary of statecraft and diplomacy. Better the truth and decency. I shall never look favorably upon Olvir again."

"And there, I think, you show injustice," said Swain.

The emperor started up.

"Injustice! How? Why do you say that? You of all——"

"I would have you remember," answered Swain evenly, "that I am Olvir's enemy. And these skalds are my men."

"True."

Manuel sank back in his chair.

"Just, Swain—as I might have expected of you. Yet am I none the less certain these skalds spoke the truth."

"Skald's truth is not ordinary men's truth," replied Swain. "There is one certain test of truth."

"What?"

"Battle."

Silence again. And again the emperor broke it.

"No, no, Swain. It can not be — not here. Olvir I might dismiss, it is true; but it would be knave's work to deliver him with two hundred men to you with five hundred."

"I ask no more of Olvir than a fair chance in battle," said Swain calmly. "Bethink you, you spoke earlier of how you might school your people in the city to realize the hardships of life—and death. How better than by giving them an opportunity to see men die for an honorable stake?"

"No, no," repeated Manuel. "You do not know what you ask, Swain. You do not know what an uproar the priests would make."

"Why?" urged Swain. "Bethink you, Lord, we are not Greeks. And soon or late my men must clash with Olvir's. Until now I have kept mine on leash, and Olvir's interest is to restrain his, since he dare not try again to rid himself of me by assassination. But this can not continue always, and be sure that even though you ordered me from the city I should find some means of returning in disguise, and compassing my purpose. I have tracked Olvir down at last, and I will not let him go."

"It would be a brave sight," said Oddi softly. "Men would talk of it for long years hence—two shield-walls of Northmen smashing together in the midst of Mikligard."

"A tournament the Franks call these mêlées," exclaimed the emperor. "They think little of them. But here—our people are soft—our priests——"

"You promised me whatever reward I sought," Oddi reminded him.

And Armod clinked the signet-ring upon the table's edge.

"This ring, Lord," he said. "It was to be redeemed."

Manuel laughed.

"You are fit men for such a lord," he answered. "And will you skalds go to battle with Swain?"

They cried assent, and Swain said gruffly:

"Saving us chiefs and a forecastle-man or two, there are no more redoubtable swordsmen among us than these twain."

It was apparent the emperor wavered in his purpose, as he drained his cup again.

"But two hundred against five hundred," he objected.

"I am content with even numbers," said Swain. "I would be content to face Olvir, man to man, save that I know he would find excuse to refuse such a meeting."

"He is no coward," protested Manuel. "You wrong him."

"He is no coward," rejoined Swain; "but I know him well. He has not been willing to meet me singly since our first fight on the sea-beach in Morkaorsbakki, of which Oddi told you."

A third time silence enwrapped the room.

"It shall be done," cried the emperor suddenly. "I will jar my people out of their smugness. I will cause a proclamation to be made that enmities have developed betwixt your folk and certain of the Varangians, and that to keep the ill feeling from spreading and corrupting the whole guard I have consented that the disputants shall submit their causes to ordeal by battle, sixty men upon a side. And I shall say, too, that I wish my people to have the opportunity to observe how the Northmen fight their battles for them, and my chariot-drivers to learn the way brave men venture their lives for a point of honor."

"You will not regret it, Lord," said Swain. "We have showed you something of Northern skaldcraft Now we will show you Northern weaponcraft. Skaldcraft has its place, but the ax and the sword rule all."

CHAPTER XV

OF HOW SWAIN AND OLVIR FOUGHT IN THE HIPPODROME BEFORE THE EMPEROR, AND OF WHAT CAME OF IT THERE

THE next day the Emperor Manuel made his proclamation, and there was such excitement in Mikligard as men said had not been known since the emperor's father came home from the Saracen wars with a train of captive emirs and booty that crowded the Mese from the Golden Gate to the Augustation. The patriarch waited on the emperor in a stew of indignation, and threatened the participants in the ordeal, as well as all connected with it, high or low, with every peril of excommunication and unconsecrated burial; but Manuel soon brought the prelate to terms.

"Look you, Holy Father," he said, "in Jerusalem, where the Redeemer lived and died, the Christian knights who guard His sepulcher must keep themselves in condition to meet the heathen at any time. And in part to aid them to the better performance of their duty to Him, they practise against one another in the lists, and reckon honorable all men who defend themselves against personal enemies in a way which makes them better Christian soldiers. Moreover, in all the Frankish lands it is nowadays accepted that the noblest should settle their disagreements in public instead of resorting to secret warfare and assassination."

"But this is neither Jerusalem nor the Frankish lands," pointed out the patriarch. "Our customs are opposed ——"

"Our customs are one source of our growing weakness," declared the emperor. "We, who once held back the heathen unaided, must now summon all the nations of the Franks to help us. I wish the people to see how these Northmen gladly risk their lives to maintain their honor. Perhaps, then, we shall have more Greeks and fewer barbarians in the next host we send to battle with the Saracens."

"It amounts to the levying of private war in our midst," protested the patriarch. "Are we to drop back to the bloody days of the pagan emperors, when men were pitted against each other for pleasure in the arena?"

"It might be better if we did," snapped the emperor.

And as the patriarch crossed himself in horror, Manuel went on:

"Better a race of valiant pagans, Holy Father, than of Christian weaklings, unworthy of divine salvation. No! I will hear no more. These Northmen have a quarrel among themselves, and I will have them settle it as they wish, so that it can not continue as a sore spot in the ranks of the Varangs. In acting so I shall achieve two purposes; for discipline will be upheld and justice done, and at the same time, as I have said, my people shall taste the meaning of the sterner virtues."

The patriarch retreated, unconvinced, but loath to push the issue to extremes.

So, too, Olvir Rosta, when he discovered the emperor's determination, concealed whatever distaste he had for the encounter.

"This is none of my seeking, Lord," he boomed in his great bull's voice. "And if trouble flows from it I will not be held accountable. But it shall not be said that I was reluctant to submit my cause to judgment by ordeal—even though I have but two hundred men to select my sixty from and Swain can choose his out of five hundred."

"Let him choose his sixty where he will, so they be Northmen," spoke up Swain, who stood at the emperor's side.

"It shall be so," assented Manuel. "The ranks of the Varangs are open to you, Olvir."

Olvir bowed his head.

"We will give you rare entertainment, Lord," he promised. "I know that you will see fair play done."

"Fair play to both sides," replied the emperor coldly.

That evening Eindridi swaggered aboard *Deathbringer*, very drunk and vastly indignant.

"Ha, Swain," he cried, "I have just put that scoundrel Olvir where he belongs. Curse him for a presumptuous fellow! To think he could buy me with a beggarly turmarchy!"

Swain looked up from his consultation with Erling, Erik and the other ship-captains and forecastlemen over the selection of men for the fight.

"He thought you had accepted his aid," growled Swain, a rare twinkle in the corner of his eye.

"He thought I would betray you—for his turmarchy!" raged Eindridi, purple with injured vanity. "I and my men were to go over to him in the fighting. Bah! I will go before the emperor and denounce him."

"No, no," said Swain. "He would only say that you lied. But what did you say to him, Eindridi?"

"I told him I had better friends than he," replied Eindridi pompously. "And when I told him the emperor had promised to make me strategos he answered that it was too expensive a price to pay for me. I would have smitten him down on the spot, but that there were guards all around us."

"St. Magnus be thanked you did not attempt it!" exploded Erik. "Let there be a fight between now and the morrow, and the emperor might cancel the ordeal."

"At the least, and despite Eindridi's injured feelings, we are the better for the incident in that we know Olvir's guile has failed," said Erling.

But Swain shook his head.

"We have escaped the first stroke of his guile," he answered. "But his wit is not exhausted. We must be on the lookout for trickery all the time."

"He will not trick me," retorted Eindridi. "All I ask of you Swain, is that you give me a chance in the Hippodrome to strike one blow at him. I shall be loath to take your vengeance from your hands, but if I strike that blow you will be rid of Olvir."

"That is good hearing," replied Swain gravely. "It is my intention to give you the command of the right wing, with Erling commanding the left. But it is my hope that Olvir will fall to my lot; he is the best man with the ax I ever faced."

"What boots his ax against my sword?" boasted Eindridi, stumbling away.

Erik, at Swain's elbow, growled in the chief's ear:

"Best leave out the fool. He will only make trouble."

"Not so," denied Swain. "If Eindridi is a fool he is a brave fool."

"Also, his ship's company would be angered if he was not in our muster," advised Erling.

"Yes, we must have Eindridi on that count, too," agreed Swain, "for there are eight men in his crew I could not well do without."

That evening the Northmen lay down early in their sleeping-bags, but they were up with the dawn, and every one on the six ships was busy sharpening blades, scrubbing armor, mending the links in mail-shirts and polishing helms or bracing stronger the plated linden-wood of shields.

AN HOUR past midday came a party of watchmen to escort them to the Hippodrome, and they marched up through the city in solid array; first, the Greeks of the escort; next, the sixty champions; and last, the remainder of the six crews, every man, sick or well. There was not left behind so much as a cripple for ship-guard. And all the way through the city the folk applauded them, and exclaimed over their stature. So many people were in the streets that the vainer men wondered if there would be as numerous an assembly in the Hippodrome as on the afternoon the chariot-races were held. But concerning this their fears were soon set at rest.

In the open square between the Great Church of St. Sophia and the Mangana, with the Palace of the Kathisma towering above the craggy foundations of the magazines, the escort troops halted the Northmen. The champions were ranked at one side, and the remainder of the crews were led off through the western gate, which was called the Gate of the Blues, to seats in the Bouleutikon on that side.

Swain and his men waited there in the warm sunshine, while the murmurs and movements of a hundred thousand spectators drifted to them over the pile of the Mangana and the Kathisma. Presently another compact column of tall Northmen came into view on the eastern side of the square, and Olvir and his champions were halted, a long-ship's length distant from Swain's folk.

Another interval of waiting, and the emperor appeared on horseback in his mail, a company of glittering officers around him. He rode up to Olvir, and inspected his men, noting that the Varangs had been stripped of the insignia of the guards, so that there should be no color of Imperial preference for them, and then crossed the square to where Swain stood, leaning on his shield.

Manuel's eagle face was lighted by the warrior's joy in battle; his eyes crackled with the zest of his emotions.

"They are stout people over there, Swain," he said. "You have never faced a bitterer test."

"I shall win," replied Swain confidently.

"Be not too sure. But talk is futile. Here are the conditions of the ordeal. I, as marshal, will drop my baton as signal for the two parties to engage after you have been arrayed opposite each other in the Stama, facing north and south. Any wounded man may surrender himself to an opponent, saving only the two chiefs, who must fight to the death. But either side may surrender entire after its chief is dead."

"I understand," said Swain.

"May the Redeemer aid you! Forward!"

While the emperor dismounted and sought the imperial entrance to the Kathisma, which led through the Church of St. Stephen, built against the wall of the Mangana, Swain's champions were led to the Gate of the Blues and through its portal beneath the banks of seats into the bright light of the arena. At the same instant Olvir and his men marched in through the Gate of the Greens in the opposite eastern wall. Swain's men were placed with their backs to the Spina, facing north, and Olvir's a hundred feet away, with their backs to the Pi and the imperial throne, facing south.

A shout from the spectators greeted the entrance of the contestants, and its reverberations were still rolling between the massive walls when the emperor's arrival caused its duplication. As Manuel strode down from the throne and out to the railing of the Pi, baton in hand, the hundred thousand rose to him in a mighty hail of acclaim. From their throats poured ghostly echoes of the shouts their ancestors of the legions had accorded emperors whose domains had embraced the entire Western world.

"Hail, Manuel Emperor—Hail, King of the Romans!—Live, Augustus!—Imperial Caesar conquers!"

Swain and his folk were as undisturbed by the noise as they were ignorant of its meaning. They thought it foolish, and Swain yawned behind his shield. After one glance at the serried masses crowding promenades and seats, he had turned his attention upon Olvir's array, and studied it for a key to his enemy's plans.

The two lines of men were exactly similar in every respect, except for one detail. Swain stood practically in the center of his line, but Olvir remained alone behind his shield-wall, ready to spring in whichever direction danger threatened. Both lines were composed in almost equal numbers of axmen and swordsmen. Both lines presented a united front of close-locked shields, over which peered savage warrior faces, capped with peaked steel helms. A few men carried spears—for casting rather than for thrusting; but, as always in Northern battles, the opponents placed their confidence in the shock of disciplined men, and the hewing of steel edges. True warriors disdained missile weapons, save as a prelude to battle.

So far as Swain could judge, Olvir, like himself, had distributed his best men in the center and at the two extremities of the line. As between the physical appearance of the two bands, there was practically nothing to choose. They were all men of stature and exceptional strength, those like Erik and Oddi, who lacked height, making up for it in breadth and agility.

From the opposing line Swain switched his gaze to their immediate surroundings. On two sides the wall of the Bouleutikon rose two spears' lengths above the sandy floor of the arena. Behind Swain's line a row of wooden hurdles had been stretched from either end of the Spina to these side walls, shutting off from the remainder of the arena a space some three hundred feet by two hundred feet, the fourth side of which was formed by the latticed gates leading into the stables of the Mangana. These gates were closed, and the Greeks who had escorted the champions into the arena were at that moment shutting and fastening the inner gates in the side walls which gave upon the Gates of the Blues and the Greens.

The Northmen were alone together on the sandy floor, and as the emperor, standing immovable at the railing of the Pi, raised his baton in air a sudden hush overcame the multitudes who stood or sat or crouched upon the sloping marble banks that lifted up to the fringe of statues on the outer wall of the promenade, white figures against the deep blue of the Autumn sky.

"*Deus vult!*" cried Manuel in the old Latin tongue which was the tradition of his empire.

Down came the baton. The hostile lines swayed, straightened, then went forward, shield lapping shield. Little spurts of sand whisked from under their feet, and the sun flashed from bared steel; but to the folk on the marble benches it must have seemed like a parade, until Eindridi, on the far right of Swain's line, flung a spear across the heads of Olivir's men at Olvir, himself.

"That for you, Olvir!" he cried.

Several of the Varangs in Olvir's array ducked their heads as it flashed by, but Olvir laughed and reached out and plucked it from the air.

"I take it," he answered. "Now, you, Swain's folk."

And he hurled it at the nearest part of Swain's line with such force that it smote through a man's shield and mail, and that man had his bane of it.

"Close ranks," called Swain.

But there were more spears hurtling from both sides, and each line closed ranks twice before they met. Four men were down on the sand, and one of Swain's staggered after his comrades, tugging at the shaft which was embedded in his thigh.

The spectators in the stands held their breath at the grim determination of these mailed giants, and the brisk readiness with which the gaps in the shield-walls were stopped.

Swain shouted an order, and his men quickened their pace to a run. Olvir's line did likewise. And the two lines crashed breast to breast with a flat, grinding din. Hammer! *Crash! Cling-clang! Cling-clang!* Sword notching sword, axes biting into helms, the thud of steel hewing into flesh, clatter of straining mail. A man's head flew up on a great spout of blood; arms and legs shot into the air; men tottered back from the lines, and circled wildly or clapped hands to vitals and died. A confused shouting rose and mingled with the sifting clouds of sand, hoarse challenges, cries of derision, threats, groans of anguish.

Olvir, quick to seize upon an advantage, saw his folk force back Eindridi's flank, and threw himself into the turmoil on that end of the line. His immense ax cracked open a man's helm as though it had been an egg-shell, but Eindridi, resplendent in gilded mail, leaped in front of the outlaw and dealt him stroke for stroke. It was well for Eindridi, then, that his harness was of steel of proof beneath the trinketry of its adornment, for no brave fool could hope to match Olvir's brawny arms and barrel chest and the wily brain which looked always beyond an enemy's next move. Olvir beat him to his knees, and would have slain him, but for the rush of Erik and two of his own men, who drove Olvir to seek the protection of the Varangs' shield-wall.

Under the sand haze fivescore men hacked and tore at each other, and the Greeks of the factions yielded to the spell of the raw savagery of the spectacle, forgot their first burst of awe, and yelled on the contestants with all the capricious zeal of those pagan ancestors they had imitated when they greeted the emperor. The Blues adopted the cause of Swain, who had entered through their gate, and the Greens similarly favored Olvir. And to differentiate the opposing lines, Swain's folk were called the Northland men and Olvir's the Varangs, since some of them were known by sight to the citizens.

"On, Northland men!" howled the western benches.

"Stand, Varangs, stand!" shouted the eastern.

But the first rush was ended. It was not possible for men to maintain that ceaseless anvil battering without a rest, and sullenly, reluctantly, with many a brief rally and repeated onslaught, the two lines drew away from each other and reformed. Swain had lost twelve men dead to Olvir's ten, but those who looked close observed that in Olvir's longer array there were more men whose mail showed bloody gaps and whose knees sagged under them as they walked.

"THEY have taken toll of us, Swain," said Erling as they dressed their shields.

"It is to be expected, Erling. They will pay for it in this onfall."

"Ho, Swain," called Eindridi, "did you mark that I had first stroke at Olvir?"

"I did," answered Swain. "I bade you leave him to me."

Erik whirled his ax over his head, grinning at Eindridi.

"My advice is that you should not step in Swain's way when he offers to relieve you of a foe like Olvir," quoth the Icelander. "But for me——"

"If you had not let him run off between your crooked legs, Erik, he would have been on the sand here," retorted Eindridi.

And there was much gruff laughter at this, for it was a fact that Erik presented a comical figure in action, straddling his short, bowed legs far apart to give himself a better stance for the smashing blows he rained with his ax.

"Take heed, there, Swain's men," bade Swain. "When the shields meet this time Olvir will try trickery."

"Other men may be fooled, then," cried Eindridi, "but not I."

There was no opportunity for more to be said, for Olvir was advancing. The men braced their shields firmly on their left arms and swung swords and axes over their right shoulders, so that they could strike forward and down over the shields tops the moment the lines came together. And once more they broke into a trot, and Swain's men ran faster and in better order than did Olvir's because there were fewer wounded among them.

Olvir saw this, and barked an order which pulled his men out of line into a column four abreast which he aimed at Eindridi's flank, the part of Swain's line he had smitten the hardest in the previous encounter. But Swain was no less vigilant, and as Olvir's men fell back to take their places in the column he wheeled his entire line to the left, with the result that he overlapped and flanked Olvir.

Full-tilt into Eindridi Olvir drove like a battering-ram, and Eindridi and the men about him were bowled right and left as ships are tossed by a stormy sea. Eindridi, himself, escaped Olvir's personal attack, and fought valiantly, hewing and striking with all his might; but of the ten men then with him six died and the rest must have perished also, except that Swain smashed into the flank of Olvir's column, and reaped a bloody harvest out of all proportion to the loss Endridi suffered.

Olvir's formation was hewn apart. His men were slain where they stood, fumbling to reestablish their shield-wall, or else fell away battered and wounded. Half of them went down before the vigor of Swain's push, and Swain, seeing how matters went, addressed himself to seeking his personal vengeance.

Erik and several more were by him and they charged through the ruck of the fighting in pursuit of Olvir, who had succeeded in keeping by him the head of his column, the strongest of his supporters. But Olvir was in no mood to front Swain, with the odds shifted against him. He retreated as Swain approached, black beard bristling, bull voice summoning to him all those of his folk who could stand on two legs or shake themselves free of Swain's people; and so successful was he in this that he shortly outnumbered Swain's immediate following, and Swain was compelled to dispatch Armod to pry loose more of his men from the harrying of the fragments of Olvir's midbattle and rear.

They were now close under the Pi, whereon stood the emperor, staring down with flushed cheeks and kindled eye at the carnage spread broadcast upon the sand. From Blue and Green benches rose a swelling chorus of adjuration, for these soft Greeks, used at most to the excitement of seeing an occasional unskilful charioteer upset under the horses' hoofs, had gone mad over the bloodshed in the arena.

"Back, Varangs!" screamed the Greens. "Stand to it! Face them out!"

"The Northmen win!" clamored the Blues.

"A thousand bezants on the Northmen," shrieked a man.

"Let the chiefs fight it out," howled the Greens.

"No, no, the Northmen win," answered the Blues.

Olvir retreated warily around the corner of the Pi, which projected out into the arena from the Imperial platform atop of the Kathisma. Behind him now was the barrier of gates which shut off the stables of the Mangana from the Hippodrome, and behind one of these gates Swain spied a plump figure, in a gorgeously embroidered robe and high-crowned head-dress, huddled against the bronze framework.

Even as he exulted in the belief that his enemy was cornered at last, Swain wondered vaguely at the presence in that spot of one of the palace eunuchs. Exultation and wonderment faded together as the gate commenced to swing open, and Olvir's party took to their heels.

"Treachery!" shouted Swain.

But in the disorder of the fighting that still raged over the northern end of the arena very few of his men heard his call, and only those citizens in the front seats at the north end of the Bouleutikon on the Green's side had a clear idea of Olvir's trick—and they were too delighted by the escape of their adopted champion to do more than laugh and cheer.

Swain and those with him—Erik, Erling and some ten more—sped toward the opened stable gate as fast as they could run under the weight of their mail. But Olvir had ample time to slam and bar it behind his men, and they reached the grating too late for anything but a brief glimpse of a knot of figures disappearing down a vaulted corridor, from either side of which came the whinnies of horses driven frantic by the smell of blood and the clamor of the struggle.

The gate groaned under the impact of their hard-driven bodies, but it stood firm, and there was no hope of tearing its hinges from the stones in which they were bolted.

"We must try the gate we entered by," panted Swain.

But Erik pushed him aside.

"No, no, Swain," protested the Icelander. "It would not consort with our honor if we failed to follow where Olvir led. Stand back, all, and give me ax room."

And he heaved up his ax and brought its keen blade down upon the bar which held the gate. The framework quivered, and a nick showed in the bronze. Again Erik struck, and again, and again. Then the bar clanged on the stone floor, and Swain heaved the gate open.

"After them," he ordered; "but first let us catch that fat pig who saved them from us here."

"Not so," objected Erling. "What care we for him? Olvir is our prey."

"We should lose time," urged Erik.

"We shall gain time," returned Swain, peering into the first stall they came to. "That bag of tallow would never run—and he will know where Olvir flees."

CHAPTER XVI

OF HOW SWAIN PURSUED OLVIR ACROSS THE SEA-WOOD, AND OF WHAT CAME OF THAT VENTURE

AS SWAIN pushed into a second stall a pair of hoofs flirted past his helm and a four-legged fury spun around and fastened strong white teeth in the edge of the shield he hastily interposed.

"No, no," said Swain, "it is not a stallion I seek."

And he quickly backed out and refastened the stall door.

All up and down the corridor his men were darting in and out of stalls, dodging kicks and bites, prodding in the straw, peering into mangers. There were none of the servants of the Mangana in evidence, for every man had gone abovestairs to watch the ordeal in the arena; and Swain began to believe that he had best be guided by Erik's and Erling's advice when a yell came from Oddi, and the little skald dragged out of an empty stall an unkempt object which sank abjectly on fat knees as Swain approached.

"M-m-mer-mer-mercy, Lord!" it squealed.

"It is Nicephorus," exclaimed Swain with satisfaction. "Where is Eindridi! Ho, there, Eindridi, make this snake tell where Olvir is gone."

The former Varangian panted up, his armor cracked and torn, adrip with blood, his voice a croak in his throat.

"Leave him to me, Swain," he answered boastfully. "I will soon turn him inside out."

"Haste, then," commanded Swain. "There is scant time."

Eindridi shook his blade in the eunuch's pink face.

"What of Olvir?" he demanded. "Where is he gone?"

"I know not, Lord," quavered Nicephorus.

"You lie!"

"No, no, Lord Eindridi! I know nothing. I am only——"

"You opened the gate for him."

"It was not I. No, no, it was——"

"You lie!" rasped Eindridi, and Nicephorus cowered away from him as the sword flashed an inch from his nose.

"But I know nothing of where he is gone! He would not trust——"

"Too slow," growled Swain, and swept Nicephorus's fat body under one arm, and walked with him along the corridor to the second stall door he had opened. "Perhaps I shall seek a stallion, after all."

He kicked the stall door as he spoke, and the stallion replied with a shower of blows from his hoofs and squeals of rage.

"In there you go," threatened Swain, making to unbolt the door.

And though Nicephorus did not understand a word of what was said, he knew Swain's meaning and groveled on the floor.

"I will tell all! Oh, yes, all! He is gone to the ships."

"What ships?" asked Eindridi.

"The Lord Swain's. He will put to sea in one of them."

"He has not sufficient men with him," protested Eindridi. "Beware how you deceive me or——"

"Lord, I am not deceiving you," wailed the eunuch. "The rest of Olvir's men awaited him outside the Hippodrome."

Eindridi translated this information, and Swain gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"If Olvir takes to the sea we can follow," he said. "These lands are strange to me, but the sea is always the same."

He turned to the weary, battered men who were still tramping through the broken gate from the shambles of the arena.

"Erik, do you collect the rest of our folk in the Hippodrome and come after us to the wharf. Swiftly, man, for the day wanes. Eindridi, I leave you to go to the emperor, and explain to him what has happened. Now, then, forward, all Swain's men."

But Oddi tapped his arm.

"And this——"

The little skald motioned to Nicephorus, still huddled on the dung-strewn floor.

"Oh, that!" answered Swain carelessly. "Well, seeing that I have made somewhat of a practise of slaying his kind I will attend to him myself."

And before the eunuch knew the fate in store for him, Swain's sword had cleaved his neck and his head rolled down to the arena gate.

A few grooms and horse-boys appeared as the Northmen threaded the maze of stables to the Mangana's exit, but none thought of staying the champions, and they ran from darkness into the declining sunshine of the late afternoon in the square of the Augustation just as the excited crowds of spectators commenced to pour from the gates of the Hippodrome. Swain and his folk forced a path through these masses without difficulty, for no Greek cared to block the passage of these dreadful, blood-stained figures, with their dented helms and broken shields, who ran silently as shadows through the city's busy streets.

Now and then a man would cry to them that Olvir had gone this way or point ahead; but for the most part the citizens shrank away and wondered fearfully what fresh deed of blood would be ripe for gossip on the morrow.

Swain, in the lead, was panting heavily and a dozen of his followers had sunk exhausted on the cobbles before they reached the city gate which gave upon the section of the harbor where their ships were berthed. The soldiers at the gate would have stopped them, but a look at Swain's face sent the wardens scurrying to the guard-room benches. Through the gate, then, and into the tangle of waterfront lanes, and all at once the harbor opened up before them, their ships straight ahead and Eindridi's *Seamaiden* shoving off from the wharf.

An oath ripped from Swain's tongue, and he forced his tortured limbs to a greater effort; but there was a wide stretch of water between wharf and dragon by the time he had staggered to the farthermost string-piece.

The tide was running out, and *Seamaiden's* prow was pointed for the Bosphorus. Her oars were beginning to dip in unison, and Olvir waved a mocking blade as Swain halted on the wharf's end. Swain turned his back without a word.

"Make *Deathbringer* ready," he ordered the men who streamed after him. "Warp her out into the stream. We must be ready to go as soon as we have enough rowers."

Weary as they were, the champions toiled unceasingly under Swain's direction. While some of them manned the cables, and hauled the big dragon around the end of the wharf, others conned over her gear, drew the oars from under the rowing-benches and propped them in their slots, fetched extra casks of water from other ships and broke out spears, bows and sheaves of arrows from the weapon-chests. When Erik galloped on to the wharf with the vanguard of the men who had watched the ordeal, biting their thumbs for envy of the men dying on the arena's sands, it remained only to embark a sufficient crew and they cast loose in pursuit of *Seamaiden's* dwindling hull.

"My share of the voyage's plunder to you, men, if we take Olvir," called Swain from the poop, and the rowers roared assurance to him.

AS *DEATHBRINGER* pulled out into the Siavidarsund—the Golden Horn of the Greeks — *Seamaiden* rounded the point where sea-walls and harbor-walls joined, and headed southwest into the sea of Marmora. Westward the sun was sinking low in the horizon, and ahead of the dragon a Greek galley was rowing slowly across the mouth of the Horn.

Swain, his eyes fixed upon the shape of Olvir's dragon, paid no attention to the galley until Erik pointed it out to him, and Erling exclaimed—

"They are towing something!"

"Yes," said Erik grimly, "the sea-wood."

He meant the great boom supporting the chain which was stretched across the harbor to close it.

Swain leaped to the bulwarks and stared closely at the low bulk towing behind the galley. And he realized that Erik was right. The harbor watch were closing the harbor.

"Faster!" he shouted to the rowers.

But Erling shook his head doubtfully.

"The boom is already across our prow, Swain."

"But if we can catch up with the Greeks they will let us pass," retorted Swain.

"I do not think so," said Erik.

"This smells to me like a part of Olvir's trick."

"*Humph,*" growled Swain, and his blue eyes took on the cold, stony glare that made even his friends fear him.

Deathbringer's dragon prow cut the water like a sea-snake in the mating-time.

"*Ha-ho! Ho-ha!*" rumbled the rowers in chorus.

And lest their efforts slacken Oddi sprang to the poop's edge and sang them the "Rower's Song" which Gunar Klining made. But their attempt was hopeless. The galley reached the tower opposite the city, and the end of the chain was hooked and shackled to the tower's base close by the water's edge.

"Larboard, steersmen," ordered Erik.

But Swain silenced him with a fierce gesture.

"Straight on," he said.

"But you, yourself, advised that we should ask the Greeks to let us by," exclaimed Erling in surprize. "It is not yet dark, and they will surely——"

"If they have been bribed by Olvir to do this it will profit us nothing to ask them," replied Swain. "I propose to pass the sea-wood in my own fashion."

"How?" asked Erik.

"You will see," answered Swain. "First, shift all our gear aft."

They obeyed him, carrying ballast, goods and provisions to the stern until the prow was out of water. Then he bade them hoist the sail, as there was a slight quartering wind which might favor them; and when this was done, he went to the break of the poop and spoke to the rowers.

"Sit square in your seats," he said, "and hold tight to your oars, for it may be that you will have difficulty in remaining in your places. Also, row as hard as you may, whatever happens."

The rowers did as he bade them, and the dragon came up to the boom at racing speed.

"Are we to run upon the sea-wood, Swain?" asked Erling. "I do not see how that will further your purpose."

"No," returned Swain, "we are to run over it. Now, do each of you in the ship who is not rowing take upon his back as much as he can carry, a cask, a chest, a sack of ballast, whatever is handy. And when I give the word, all of you shall run forward along the gangway to the forecastle. Be ready!"

They did as he said, and when *Deathbringer* struck the boom she rode up on it because her prow was so high out of the water, and hung there. And it was at this moment that Swain called out:

"Forward, every man! Pull, rowers, pull!"

The men with the burdens ran forward, so that the dragon's prow commenced to tip down, and the rowers tugged at the oars. There was a grinding of bottom strakes on the pegged timbers of the hull, a groaning and protesting of the vessel's whole fabric—and then she slid slowly ahead and across the boom, gathering way rapidly as her forward end took the water.

"Swain passes where no man passed before!" exclaimed Erling.

Armod and Oddi thundered on their shields, and a shout of acclamation went up from the straining rowers in the waist. But Erik pointed to a heap of leaden clouds swirling low in the darkening southern sky.

"There is a storm coming," he said. "We have had good luck, but we shall need more."

The gathering darkness brought a chill wind which blew harder and harder. *Seamaiden* vanished in the gloom behind a turmoil of waves running forecastle-high. Foam spurted through the oar-holes, and spray swept over the shields in the waist. The sail had to come down; the oarsmen were soaked; the decks were drenched; and to make their situation worse, the bottom sheathing began to leak, not sufficiently to imperil the ship, but so as to serve as a drag upon their progress.

Swain clung to the bulwarks by the break of the poop, his eyes boring into the night, heedless of the wave-spume that stung the unbandaged cuts in arms and thighs. For a while he had an occasional glimpse of *Seamaiden* in the murk as she lifted to the top of a wave; but very soon she became a thing entirely apart from them, and they labored on in the gloom, steering by sense of touch and instinct and the memories of their voyage up through these same waters to the city behind them.

It was dangerous work, this. Once Erik from the forecastle bellowed a warning, and they sheered sharply to starboard past a rocky isle against which the waves thundered with a booming sound that overbore the riot of the wind. Another time, at the worst of the storm, a monstrous wave smote the dragon's bow, and beat her around into the trough of the sea, where a second wave boarded her waist, rolled her gunwale under and carried two men to death. There was a wild time, then, while the rowers, laboring in water to their knees, pulled her head around again, and kept her on the course.

Such weather as this the long-ships were used to mitigating by lying at anchor under the land's shelter. It was not possible for human brawn to hold up under the constant strain of the bucking oars, and the night was still young when Swain and every other man in the ship, except those at the steering-sweeps, must relieve the rowers. And so it went all night, the crew working in shifts at the oars, turn and turn about. But no man slept, for there was no place to lie that was not wet, and the autumn cold gripped the very marrows even of these hardy viking folk.

Morning brought scant improvement in their situation. The storm moderated, but the horizon was dull and gray, the waves choppy, and *Seamaiden* was out of sight. Swain held brief consultation with his chief men, and decided to press on. He might have distanced Olvir in the night, but it was more probable that with his start and the disadvantage of *Deathbringer's* leak the outlaw had bettered his original lead. They rowed on tirelessly, morning and afternoon, until at last they had a favoring wind, which aided them through the night. The next morning they made a landfall on their starboard bow, and held to the larboard for the outer straits which lead to the sea beyond, that sea which divides Serkland from Frankland.

On the shore of this strait was a small town of the Greeks, and Erik suggested that they should go ashore here and make inquiry for Olvir, and Swain assented. They had ill tidings, for a Greek who could speak a little of the Valland tongue told them that a long-ship like their own had driven past the town in the early morning shortly after dawn. Olvir had held his lead, and increased it.

But Swain refused to be discouraged, and he imparted his spirit to the crew. They rowed and sailed as best they could to the town on the promentory of Aegisness, where they had tarried to red up their ships before they sailed on to Mikligard, and here they received still worse tidings. Olvir had passed a day and a night since; he had doubled his lead. But again Swain refused to be discouraged, and again *Deathbringer* steered out into the wastes of the Inner Sea, which is strewn thickly with islands; and it chanced that a second storm overtook them in the midst of this sea, and to save themselves from utter loss they were compelled to run ashore in a small harbor they came upon—and men say that this was good fortune, rather than ill, for what with the continual buffeting of the waves, and the strain of the rowers, the leak in the dragon's bottom was become a menace to her.

Four days they bided on this island, and they turned the occasion to good account by hauling their craft upon the beach and stopping the leak; but when they were ready to put to sea again Swain called all his men around him and spoke to them in this wise:

"It is plainly to be seen that Olvir has escaped us for the time being, although we have harried him from Mikligard. My own inclination is to fare after him without loss of time, but it is to be remembered that many score of our comrades remain behind us, and we owe an obligation to them. Therefore I suggest that we return to Mikligard, and collect our comrades, and then fare forth in pursuit of Olvir. The sea he voyages is the sea we must recross to reach our homes."

"I am a young man, and my opinion is not very valuable, perhaps," answered Erling, when Swain looked to him for an answer; "but I am emboldened to speak because I find myself in agreement with you."

"Hot brain never won vengeance in a long chase," spoke up Erik.

And the others agreed, likewise. There was no man glad of the decision or proud in his heart, but they went about and sailed back to Mikligard.

CHAPTER XVII

OF HOW SWAIN BADE FAREWELL TO THE EMPEROR MANUEL, AND OF WHAT CAME THEREAFTER

WHEN *Deathbringer* reentered the Golden Horn the emperor, himself, went down to the wharf to greet Swain, and all the officers of the court with him. His was the first foot to step on the dragon's gunwale, as his hand was first to clasp Swain's—and the Greeks were all amazed that they met as two men meet, and not as common man and emperor.

"I see that you have not achieved the object of your pursuit, Swain," he remarked after a quick survey of *Deathbringer's* battered hull.

"I have not," answered Swain dourly.

"If you had slain Olvir well I know his head would have been on your prow," the emperor continued; "but perhaps he perished by other means."

"He did not," returned Swain. "He has escaped me again."

"Yet be not cast down," advised Manuel. "You have not failed for lack of trying."

"I have failed," said Swain. "And whether it is put one way or another way, the truth is always the same. I have failed."

"We will talk of this later," replied the emperor. "You shall come to the palace with me, and recount your adventures."

And he gave orders that rich foods and wines should be put aboard the ships for all the Northmen, but Swain he took into his own coach of gilded wood and ivory and together they passed up through the streets of the city, surrounded by the imperial guards, many centuries of horse and foot, with trumpets and cymbals playing lustily.

The emperor had little to say until they were in the room over the Bosphorus where he was used to spending his private hours. Here a meal was served to them, and Manuel pressed Swain for the details of the pursuit. At the conclusion of the tale he leaned forward across the table.

"Destiny—or it may be, Providence—has spoken, Swain," he said. "Plainly, you are not to slay Olvir Rosta, however wicked he may be."

"I do not concede that," growled Swain. "He is clever and treacherous, yes, and brave enough—or he would not have evaded me all these years, and wreaked the scathe he has. But his end is as certain as the coming of one year after that which precedes it. I shall see the day that Olvir falls before me."

The emperor shook his head.

"It may be, Swain, it may be," he answered, "but I doubt it. And I call to your mind this consideration. Practically all your life you have devoted to a feud, when you might have put yourself in the way to become one of the most powerful kings in the world."

"Why should I seek to be a king?" demanded Swain. "I have never yet seen the king I could not contrive to my policy, if I wished to."

Manuel smiled, albeit somewhat ruefully.

"You may well say that to me," he admitted. "I saw afterward how cleverly you molded me to your will in the matter of driving me to assent to your fighting Olvir. Well, well! It was worth it, Swain. Yes, if I died tomorrow, I would say I had not lived in vain, in that I witnessed that battle, though I had seen naught else since my cradling. But one bone I have to pick with you is over that fight."

"Pick it," answered Swain, gnawing at the leg of a fowl.

"You told me—and I believed it—yes, I was as forward in crediting it as you—that the spectacle would steel the townspeople, nerve them to be better subjects. But the bare truth is that since you sailed I have had trouble after trouble, growing out of your ordeal in the Hippodrome.

"First, it was the patriarch, solemnly conducting prayers to wipe clean the city's piety of the blemish of the slaughter, imposing penances upon all who witnessed it, besprinkling the Hippodrome itself with prayers to take from it the stigma of anti-Christ and paganism."

"He would have had short shrift had I been in your shoes," rasped Swain. "I would have pulled out his beard, hair by hair, until he learned sense."

"So you say," cried the emperor. "I would I might put your purpose to the proof. But that is not all. My border themes are always under strength, and the day after the spectacle I dispatched cohorts and centuries of troops to all the metropolitan districts and into the suburbs, beating up for recruits. What think you was the result? We gained four and a half centuries of recruits, of whom better than a full century were foreigners! Four and a half centuries of troops out of half a million hearths!"

"Why ask them to serve?" rapped Swain. "Take them, whether they will or no. Is it not their battle you fight?"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Manuel eagerly. "It *is* their battle. And I must fight it in large part with mercenaries. The poor people on the borders, they will fight, because they must. Their lives are one nightmare under the pressure of Saracen and Slav. But the fat farmers and burghers of the cities would rather pay the cost of a hireling than risk the danger of a campaign—even after the spectacle you showed them!"

"They need more than one spectacle," remarked Swain practically.

"They need a heavier hand than I have been able to put upon them," rejoined the emperor.

"That is your fault," Swain pointed out.

The emperor sighed.

"Yes—and no. You must remember, Swain, that I have few I can trust, no man big enough to attempt the many tasks which require my attention."

"That is the difficulty of any chief," said Swain. "You must choose better men to serve you."

"Ah!" retorted the emperor. "You see it, do you? That is exactly what I have a mind to do, Swain."

Swain said nothing, as there seemed to be no answer called for. The emperor leaned toward him across the table.

"I must have better men, yes. I must have at least one man I can trust absolutely. I must have a man who fears nothing, who is intelligent, who can compel enemies to his will. I must have you, Swain!"

Swain sat back in his chair.

"I have told you, Lord Emperor, that I must slay Olvir before I——"

"You have wasted your best years trying to slay Olvir," Manuel interrupted. "As I said before, it is time that you turned your talents to the winning of a place in proportion to your merits."

"I am satisfied with my place."

"No man is ever satisfied—least of all, one like you."

Swain considered this a moment.

"I agree with you," he said. "But the fact remains that I have my feud upon my hands, my sons to bring up and certain obligations I owe to the Orkneyfolk, who look to me to see that they are not misgoverned. We have a good Jarl, but the best of kings and Jarls require watching."

"You would be a good king, Swain," Manuel tried again. "Think what I offer you! Remain here by my side, and I will make you, first, commander of my armies. There are enemies on all sides for you to conquer, and so soon as the people have learned to recognize your ability you shall be crowned caesar, and sit beside me on the throne."

The emperor's eyes blazed with a fire which communicated itself across the narrow width of the table and kindled an answering flame in Swain.

"Think!" urged Manuel. "I have said caesar. I will say more. In Byzantium he becomes emperor who is most powerful and best entitled by strength to hold the throne. Other foreigners have become emperors. Other aliens of common birth have worn the purple buskins. Stay with me, Swain, and you shall share my rule as surely as I sit here."

Swain shivered slightly. It was a magnificent future that Manuel's offer extended him. It meant power—and power, to Swain, was the breath of life.

Manuel pressed his advantage, confident that Swain was yielding.

"As to your sons," he went on, "have them sent here, and we will bring them up with every advantage. They shall become princes, and if they justify themselves, as your sons should, they may tread in your footsteps."

But Swain checked him by a gesture of repugnance.

"Bring them up in this womanish luxury!" he exclaimed. "With eunuchs for attendants! No, no, Lord Emperor, that does not sound attractive in my ears. They will be better off in the Orkneyar. Men such as I were not bred in a stone-walled chamber, with braziers to keep out the cold."

"Leave them North, then, until they are grown," answered the emperor.

"For Olvir Rosta to slay! That is not to my liking, either. Nor do I care to think of others educating them."

Manuel refused to be discouraged.

"We can care for them adequately, in any case," he said. "Whether they remain in the North or come here. But I would have you consider carefully what I proffer you, Swain. It is not only for yourself, but for the advantage of Holy Church."

Swain spat with regrettable rudeness.

"I never knew but one priest whom I would put confidence in," he said. "And he had been a warrior in his youth."

"But surely you are interested in restraining the heathen from overruning our Christian lands, and upsetting our religion!" remonstrated the emperor.

Swain thought this over.

"No, I can not say that I am," he returned candidly. "I do not see that my own people are the better for Christianity—and now and again I sacrifice a horse to Odin. To be on the safe side," he added, by way of explanation.

Manuel shifted his attack.

"I spoke of the power that awaits you here," he said cunningly. "It is more than wealth, Swain. My empire is not so strong as it was once, but it is as strong as any country in the Frankish lands. I can put one hundred thousand men in the field. With you to lead them what could we not do! There are rich lands to be won back from the Saracens. The Christians of Jerusalem would gladly swear allegiance to me in return for my protection. The Slavs to the north of us would fall easily to you. Beyond is Hungary, which already owes me fealty. Beyond that we would come to the Empire of the Western Rome, which would fall ripe into your arms, for the folk who share its ruins are feeble and contentious amongst themselves. Between us, we might conquer the known world."

Swain nodded, despite himself. Some thought such as this had coursed vaguely through his mind a few moments previously.

Manuel leaped to pin down his advantage.

"And if it means anything to you, Swain, there is my friendship. I have never met the man I would sooner share with all that I own. You are such as I would be, myself. Moreover, as you well know, my lot is a hard one. An emperor leads a lonely life. And by myself I can not do the tenth of what I might compass with you to aid me."

Swain nodded again. This, too, was talk he could understand. His way of life was to bear a heavy hand toward all save his friends. For them his blood was as cheap in his estimation as whatever gold he held.

"For you I would do much," he said simply. "You are a man, the best man I ever found amongst the kings. But I must make certain what my honor demands of me."

"How could your honor profit in any other way greater than the opportunity that awaits you here?" cried Manuel. "Here is such honor as would lift you above the level of a feud with an outlaw, which would raise your sons to be of the elect of the world!"

A scowl knitted Swain's face into an ugly mask.

"Now, I am not so sure of that," he remarked. "It is true that Olvir is an outlaw, but he is my enemy, and must always be my enemy. And until I have slain him my honor is not satisfied. What would it profit my sons to be kings if their father died in dishonor?"

"But you could harass Olvir in every land and sea with the power that would be yours," pleaded the emperor. "You could send ships——"

Swain stood up, and the scowl left his face.

"Lord," he said, "you have settled it. It would not be consistent with my honor to send other men to slay my personal enemy for me. We do not hunt vengeance in that fashion in the North lands. Also, I have called to mind the sagas which Armod and Oddi recited to you in this room. They are the kind of gossip that men compose to while away the Winter evenings, and I know that they praise me unduly. Yet men would not listen to them if it was not believed that I was an honorable warrior and a Norseman.

"Here, as you say, are wealth and power beyond what we know in the North. Here I might wear silken tunics and gilded mail, like Eindridi. Here I might have a hundred servants for one house-carl or thrall in Gairsey. But I am too old to change my ways. I was reared in a wood-roofed skalli, and I should grow soft in your palaces. This life is not for me. The North made me. To the North I belong. What I do I must do for the North.

"I would do much to help you, Lord. You are my friend. But my honor requires me to pursue Olvir, and after that I owe service to the Orkneyfolk to make certain that they are justly ruled."

The emperor slumped down in his seat.

"I feared it would be so," he said sadly. "Every man must follow the path his honor shows him. My honor bade me offer you the half of my empire in order to discharge better the obligation placed upon me to defend Christendom. Your honor bids you refuse it. May the Redeemer aid us both. I shall think of you often in the days to come, and pray that you bring Olvir's throat under your sword."

He showered gifts upon Swain and Erling and all their folk, and because Eindridi had borne himself bravely in the ordeal in the Hippodrome he bestowed upon him again the post of grand acolyte over the Varangs, and he took into his service all those men of Swain's and Erling's who desired to remain in Mikligard. Close upon sevenscore elected to do so, and the upshot of this was that Swain and Erling fared homeward with two dragons where they had ventured forth with three dragons and three long-ships.

But all the cargoes they carried in their bottoms were red gold and wrought silver, and so much of these metals they had, what with the emperor's gifts and the sale of their booty and slaves to the Mikligard merchants, that they cast out all their ballast stones to make room for the ingots and chests.

Eindridi was not loath to see the chiefs depart, for he knew that he was at a disadvantage so long as Swain was in the city; but he made pretense of sorrow, saying oft and oft that he mistrusted they would not be able to find their way without him to guide them. So that one day Erik spoke out to him and said:

"Be at your ease, Eindridi. Though we lack you to blow upon our sails, our rowers will be helped by not having your vanity to load down the gunwales."

Eindridi flushed very red, and clapped his hand upon his sword.

"Do you assail my courage?" he demanded.

"Is that what you call it?" said Erik, and walked off.

Eindridi would have followed him, but Armod took his arm and said—

"Why must you, who have the emperor's favor, be resentful of a man who envies you that and the regard your valor has won?"

"Ho," exclaimed Eindridi. "Is that what itched him?"

And he swelled out his chest and strutted from the ship.

"Had I my way," remarked Armod to those who stood around, "I would have the emperor take down the stone maiden who spins on her toe over the Hippodrome and put up Eindridi in her place."

And after that saying Eindridi was called "Weathercock" all through Norway and the North lands.

The Winter season was drawing near, and some men thought that it would be best to wait until Spring; but Swain insisted upon embarking, notwithstanding, and it was because of this that many of the sevenscore who joined the Varangs elected to remain behind. For never before had viking-farers fared upon such a voyage as that from Mikligard to the Orkneyar in the depths of Winter. Yet fate, which had so far mistreated Swain in cheating him of his vengeance, now swung in his favor, and he and his folk had a fair voyage through the Inner Sea to Njorfasund.

That was the easiest Winter in the lives of old men then living, and Swain and Erling coasted northward by Spainland and Valland to Bretland with less trouble than they had had on the out voyage. Everywhere they touched and of every ship they encountered they sought news of Olvir Rosta; but the first they learned of him came from a belated Bretland merchant they overhauled as he tried to flee from them in the Narrow Seas. He told them Olvir had raided villages in his country many days since, and was gone to the westward.

"To Iceland?" asked Swain.

"No," answered Bretlander, "for he steered south of west."

"How can you be sure?"

"Our king sent galleys after him a week's sail, and so they reported when they returned."

"*Humph,*" growled Swain, and let the man go with life and his ship, seeing that he carried only stinking sheepskins for cargo.

Two months past the Yuletide Swain and Erling came to Orphir in the Orkneyar where Jarl Rognvald dwelt, and the Jarl gave a feast in their honor which was a week from the beginning to the end, and there were more men drunk at the one time than any one remembered to have seen. It was said that Swain was the one man sober in the Islands.

After that Erling announced that he must fare east to Bjorgvin and attend to his estates, and he and Swain parted with the grief that warriors know. But Armod and Oddi declared that they were Swain's men and would bide with him in the Orkneyar if he would give them house-room, which he did. It was Oddi who made up the rhyme on their voyage which became a catchword on men's tongues:

Swain's chase,
Olvir's race.

Long years were to pass before Swain was to slay Olvir under Torfa Jokul, and himself perish later in that strange way which men spoke of as "Swain's End" and which was recounted about the hearth-fires by countless skalds. But Olvir lived on in spite of Swain, and not because the Orkneyman rested idle. Back and forth across the world they followed one another, and behind them was always a trail of fire and blood. What cared they, who drew into their feud emperor, king and jarl?

THE *RISING SUN*

Apprentice Nights I

By Bill Adams

THE six of us sat in the half-deck, and the air was thick;
For the ports were closed, and our pipes were going;
From the deck without came the *click*—
The *click-clicka-click* of the sheet-chains
That slatted upon the mast—
A windy night in the forties, when the skies were overcast.

"Bill, what'll you do," asked Carlaw, "when your time is done?"
"I'll build me a ship," cried Lawley, "and I'll name her the *Rising Sun*."
And Micky, taking his pipe from his lips, stared at the light,
"No more of this going to sea for me! Not much! Good night!"
Bryant, the kid, sat dreaming. Half-hearing the big sea smother
That leaped and fell on the length of her deck,
He visioned his home and mother.
And Hansen, bent over the water-tank,
Took a long, cold drink from the dipper,
"I goes to sea mit Lawley. I likes me to sail mit a clipper.
Vee load her oop, eh, Lawley? Mit sugar an' rum?"
And Lawley, laughing, nodded: "Aye! And sail her for Kingdom Come."

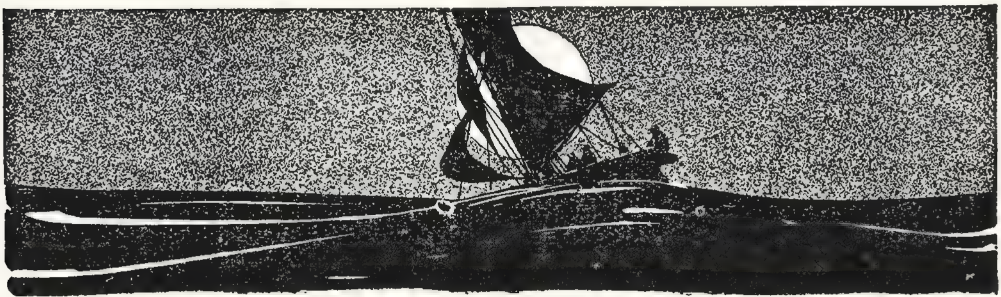
Outside the half-deck bulkheads the sea ran high,
While the wild black clouds of the forties flew over the sky,
And we felt the old ship leaping, like a horse to the hurdle rail—
Like a horse in the hunting-pastures—a beautiful ship under sail.
"I stay mit de ships," grinned Hansen, and Lawley cried—
"We'll paint her a bright apple-green, old son,
With big white ports on her side."

So we talked of the years before us, of the good years just ahead,
And Micky, taking his pipe from his lips, pondered a while, and said,
"Every ten years let's meet," said he, "for old time's sake."
And we heard a squall in the topsails, and we felt the old ship shake
As she lay to the gusts, far over, and flung her heels up high,
Like a colt that gallops in clover when April's in the sky;
And *click-clicka-click* went the sheet-chains
Outside on the mast,
A windy night in the forties, when the skies were overcast.

I've never met old Lawley, nor heard of him again;
Though often I've watched and wondered at ships half-lost in rain,
Or dim in the mists of the channel. Carlaw was drowned
When the *Rajah* piled on the Shambles, on her last lap, London-bound;
And Hansen sank with the *Chanaral* out west of the Ushant Light,
And Bryant was lost from a topsail yard on a black November night.

It's twenty years since we sat there, in the half-deck's smoke,
And yesterday I met Micky, and these were the words he spoke:
"Remember the grand old hooker? Remember the way she ran?
Say—there were no days like them, were there, eh, old man?"
And we sat, in a queer chance meeting, and stared at each other
Seeming to hear the squalls whine, and the sea's loud smother,
And the *click-clicka-click* of the sheet-chains
Outside on the mast,
On a windy night in the forties, when the skies were overcast.

Micky? A liner's captain. And me? Oh, I loaf about
And stand on the docks to watch them, the steamers going out;
Wait there and watch the tug-boats,
From dawn till the day is done—
A man that the sea has broken, I wait for the *Rising Sun.*



AS GENTLEMEN SHOULD

by William Byron Mowery

Author of "Winged Judgment," "The Cabin Window," etc.

THOUGH Winter still lingered, signs were not wanting that Spring was near to hand on the Koksoak. A southerly chinook had crossed the height of land barrier and blown down the valley of the river; but a snow northeaster had blasted the chinook and hurled it back south. Strings of over-eager pin-tails and old-squaws had honked and clackered north to the Straits; but had winged back to warmer regions faster than they had come. As sure a sign as any, the Eskimos of Northwest Ungava had komatiked in to Fort Chimo or the rival French Company House across the river; and were waiting for the sea ice to break up so that they could put their families on drifting ice-pans and hunt seals, out of sight of land, from the Koksoak to Chidley.

But Spring had not yet come; and neither had the *haut d'en pais* Nascaupees, who trapped in the teeming marten and fox country of Death River and whose fur trade it was the hot desire of both Houses to secure. In times past, and *well* past, this rivalry for the rich bales of Nascaupee fur had caused blood to be shed between the parties of bush-lopers which the bitterly hostile managers sent up to the height of land in April to make overtures and give presents to the easily-swayed Indians.

In the dog-eared journals of the Posts many an employee's record ends laconically—

"Dide not return from ye Death River Countrie."

The rivalry continued, not a whit less keen, after bloodshed was outlawed by mutual agreement; for the *haut d'en pais* marten, fox and mink are darker and finer than those of Alaska or the Mackenzie and regularly bring twice as much on the Paris or London market. Only, the contest was of wit and strategem, duplicity and double-dealing, with the French House triumphant year after year.

On an afternoon in late April came a note from Ridoubet, factor of the French establishment across the river, to Bent Avery, assistant-factor of the fort. Which gilt-edged, courteous and perfumed note requested the pleasure of the presence of the assistant-factor at dinner that evening. Avery accepted, in French as good as Ridoubet's English; and tipped the breed messenger with a plug of black and juicy *stemmo*.

For the honor of the Old Company, Bent Avery ordered up the best bell-spangled dog-team, the best komatik and the best driver at the fort. Also, in order to represent the Old Company honorably, he wore a laced suit, a cocked hat and velvet leggings; with a brass-barreled pistol under his arm and a sword with inlaid hilt swinging at his belt. An hour after dusk he was whirled the mile and a half across the river, toward the lights of the French House.

Ridoubet himself bowed his guest into the decorated room where the table was laid; and they sat down together, in the manner of bosom friends, to a dinner of roast gray wavie, white fish planked on cedar slab, sauce of Arctic cranberry, and dessicated vegetables. Two rime-covered bottles from the outside window-ledge were opened and glasses filled.

"Permit me," said Ridoubet, leaning forward with lighted match.

"Thanks," said Avery, between the third and fourth puff at a cigar.

He smoked in silence, waiting for a move from Ridoubet.

"It is almost time for the break-up," came from the host a few minutes later.

"Two weeks at the most," Avery agreed.

"The Death River Indians will soon be coming with their furs."

"I have heard the Winter has been their best in years."

"Therefore they will be the more heartily welcomed at the fort which is fortunate to get their trade this Spring," Ridoubet suggested.

"I have already had three cabins put up and a dozen tipis," said Avery, with a smile. "I have Innuits spearing seal and caribou for them."

"My cabins are still standing from last year," Ridoubet thrust politely. "Our only difference—" he bowed— "is a slight question as to whether they will occupy your cabins or mine."

"A difference, to be sure," Avery assented.

"Presumably," Ridoubet persisted, while his guest twirled his cigar nonchalantly, "we shall be sending our respective envoys up the river very soon, to meet them."

"I should not be at all surprized," said Avery. "In fact, I have put some thought to the matter already."

"This slight difference of ours is no reason why we should not agree on certain points and act in all things as gentlemen should. If it were not discourteous to talk business with a guest——"

"I am sure," Avery bowed in turn, "that your suggestions would be entirely too valuable to forego."

"It seems both needless and expensive to equip and send a party of six or more, when one man will do as well. If we can agree upon that——"

The assistant-factor reflected a moment before replying:

"Your suggestion is to the point. I can agree to sending one man."

"It might be well," continued Ridoubet, "to send middle-aged men, in order to guard against regrettable actions which hot-blooded young breeds might be roused to if the game goes against them."

"Sensible, in the light of what happened last year."

"I suggest that day after tomorrow morning would be an excellent time for starting our men."

"A trifle early," Avery demurred, thinking.

"Of course, I shall not insist, but——"

Ridoubet made a gesture which implied he was firm upon the point.

Avery smoked silently for several minutes. His host watched him, trying to fathom why he balked upon the date.

"May I inquire why the date is too early, in your opinion?" the French manager asked. "Is it that some of your men, possibly the one you count upon sending, are away and will not return before that time?"

"Possibly," said Avery, looking steadily at the rafters through a ring of smoke. "But I will agree to the date. Have you any other suggestions?"

"It is your time and turn."

"But you have taken all the sensible ones out of my mouth."

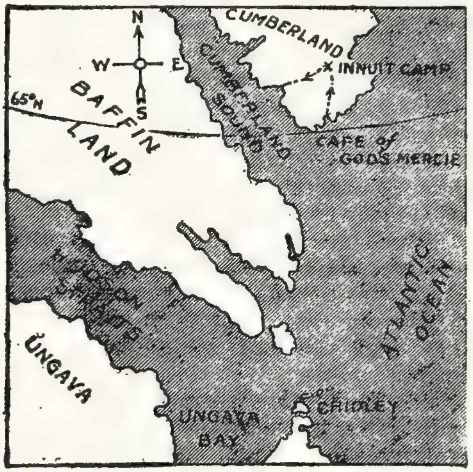
"Then we shall pledge," Ridoubet summed up, filling Avery's glass and his own. "To your best success, *m'sieur*, against my best efforts!"

"May you get every last rabbit-skin—if you can!" said the assistant-factor.

FORT CHIMO was in a ferment during the next two weeks. Stray bands of Micmacs and Montaignais wandered in and haggled endlessly over their trades. Livyeres were outfitted for the cod season. Furs were bundled in readiness for the Company ship, when the floes would let it through from its Winter station in St. James Bay. But the coming of the big band of Nascaupees — the preparation of stores and food and lodging for the sixty men and two hundred dogs, for the potlatch gathering and solid week of feasting—was the main concern. And across the river the French House seethed with activity, as busily as the fort which floated the sign of—

A SKIN FOR A SKIN.

"Who went for Avery?" was a dark question at Chimo. The assistant-factor had kept the whole affair to himself. Nobody had an inkling of what he had done. Some word of the agreement between him and Ridoubet had got out; but no one had seen the Company envoy leave for his trip into the savage height of land country. Noses were counted; guesses laid; but with sealing parties out on the ice and breeds coming and going, it was impossible to say whom Avery had sent on the all-important mission. A party of Micks who had come down the Koksoak for two hundred miles swore solemnly that only the French envoy had passed them.



On the heels of a southerly chinook Spring came with a rush in the second week. White wavies and black brandt, trumpeter swans in pairs and Arctic tern in clouds, dropped out of a marine-blue sky upon the mud islands of the Straits or along the boulder-strewn coast. In the leads opened in the fields of sea-ice, fat connies floated leisurely, graylings leaped and bearded seals dived into shoals of capulin.

With the snow fast disappearing, it would shortly be impossible to travel on dogs. The coming of the Nascaupees was near at hand.

On the last day of the second week came a second note from Ridoubet. Avery read it with a slight smile:

> *M'sieur:*
>
> It would be well, in order to show that no bad blood is harbored over the affair at hand, for the winner to give a consolation dinner to the one whose best efforts were not good enough. I therefore take pleasure in inviting you to dine with me on the evening of the day when the Indians arrive.

To which the assistant-factor answered:

> My Friend:
>
> I agree heartily to your apt suggestion. It grieves me to have to refuse your invitation to dine with you, since under the conditions, I shall be having the pleasure of your company tomorrow night.

Either a certain chilly fear of Bent Avery's ability to warp circumstances his own way, or else a certain bewilderment at mention of the exact hour, led Ridoubet to pen a second note of one line—

> Have you then heard from your envoy Gill?

To which Avery wrote briefly—

> My envoy, Gill, is rounding out his second week in the butter-tub at the fort.

As he delivered this second answer to the breed messenger, the assistant-factor took "Jay-Bird" Willett aside.

"I would like you," he said in a low voice, "to start your last trip to Nachvak a day earlier than you intended. This afternoon at five o'clock there will be a man waiting for you at Thrilling's Cove. He will go with you as far as Whale River. Here is a letter you are to deliver there to Factor Ford with my compliments. Say nothing about this, please, to any one."

"I'll do it," Willett agreed. "But say, Bent Avery, why didn't you send me to t' Death River country this Spring? Here I been layin' up for two weeks, achin' to let my team romp around that Frenchie's pups."

"You came a day too late to start, Jay-Bird. I really intended to send you. Next Spring, perhaps."

"But say, who's gettin' t' Nascaupee fur?" Willett demanded, in a hoarse whisper. "Don't think I'll leave here without findin' out!"

"Your partner can while away the trip giving you the details," Avery answered. "Remember, Thrilling's Cove at five o'clock. And recommend your partner, please, to Factor Ford."

AFTER a short time given to reading and re-reading Avery's last answer, Ridoubet took pen and wrote a third note. The ink was still wet when the breed gave it into the assistant-factor's hands.

> Your envoy, Gill, may be in jail or Jerusalem; but my envoy is with the Nascaupees. Hence it is, as your saying goes, a case of heads I win, tails you lose. Trusting you will accept my invitation to dinner by return of messenger.

Bent Avery wrote with customary brevity:

> May I differ about your envoy being with the Nascaupees? At present, or shortly, he is traveling eastward, for sake of protection, with a trusted man of mine. I press you to accept my invitation——

Ridoubet, in such a nervous tremble that his civility almost slipped away from him, came driving across the river after one hasty glance at Avery's last note. In the bastion yard he met the first half-dozen Nascaupee sleds, piled high with fur bales. In the gathering dusk he could see others coming over a granite swell on the komatik trail, the tired teams sprinting at sight of the fort.

Around leaping fires in the bastion yard the Indians were sitting on their sleds, while the fort breeds showed them quarters, brought them food and fed their strings of yellow dogs.

Ridoubet had time to smooth the scowl from his face before he went inside. Avery met him with a handshake.

"From your note," said the French manager, "I presume you discovered that I—that Gill was in my employ temporarily."

"And accepting a bribe is an act properly punishable with imprisonment," the assistant-factor answered. "Perhaps you should have taken more care for the welfare of your—ah, agent. I have had to detain him in the butter-tub temporarily."

"May I beg to know how you found out?"

"Assuredly, *m'sieur*. You told me!"

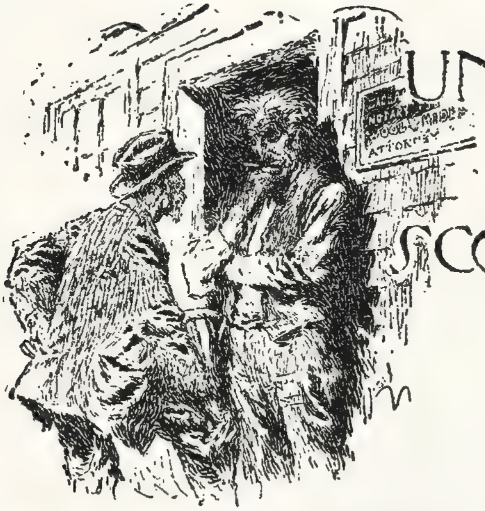
Ridoubet stiffened.

"*M'sieur*, you jest!"

"Not at all, if I may differ. You suggested, did you not? that we send one man instead of six, when you had more men at your disposal than I. That was food for thought, *n'c'est pas?* Then you suggested sending a middle-aged man. You knew I had but two who could qualify as driver and linguist. I meant Willett and Gill. Willett I could trust anywhere; Gill I was not sure about. But Willett was not at the fort then; he was due in three days. Then you insisted upon a date that ruled him out. All of which led me to suspect that you wanted me to send Gill. I was not sure, *M'sieur*, but then one must act on suspicions sometimes. After a day and a night in the butter-tub, he told me of certain—ah, irregular transactions."

"Irregular!" Ridoubet flushed. "Is there any reflection, *m'sieur*, upon my honor?"

"Not at all!" Avery answered quickly. "You acted in all things as a gentleman should. I would be libeling myself to say otherwise. For, *m'sieur*, it was your honorable *example* which led me to make certain high-priced arrangements with your envoy, even as you did with mine!"



UNCLE DUDLEY kind o' SCOUTS AROUND

by Chester T Crowell

Author of "Dillingham's Bill," "Jack and Lonis Invest," etc.

ZACHARIAH BEADLE, real estate, notary public, attorney, wool and hides bought and sold, former county judge, and Democratic boss of the county, sat in the doorway of his one-story office-building, thinking. A man with so many occupations naturally has to do a great deal of thinking. Fortunately for Mr. Beadle he had plenty of time. Otherwise he might have become muddled. However, the two hundred residents of Santa Maria got their ideas on the subject of tempo from the leisurely Rio Grande river which was only a few miles away. The primary function of that river is to divide Texas from Mexico, a task calling for an extreme minimum of speed.

A glaring sun sent its myriad rays down upon the white sand of Santa Maria with such force that they rebounded; and in consequence of sixty years experience with this sun, Mr. Beadle had acquired a permanent squint. From the corners of his eyes issued patterns of fine wrinkles spreading down across his cheeks. So delicately were they etched that one thought of the web of a particularly artistic spider when looking at them. His eyes opened warily like two little chinks on the sunny side of a board fence that let in light but give out nothing.

Mr. Beadle was nearly six feet tall and built upon approximately the same architectural lines as the telegraph pole in front of his office. In fact he sometimes referred to himself as "one hundred and forty-five pounds of meat dried on the hoof." Whether it was dried or not he should know best, but there was external evidence that it was well smoked for Mr. Beadle was seldom seen without a long Mexican cigaret—the kind that is wrapped in corn husk and filled with a potent tobacco very much resembling the large grains of coarse, black blasting-powder. His skin had approximately the color of the brownish smoke which issued from his cigaret.

Sitting thus in his doorway, getting the full benefit of the heat which accumulated under the tin roof of his office, Mr. Beadle was wondering just what Homer Whaley might want to talk about. Homer had telephoned that he was coming to the office. Since Homer was the owner of a large ranch, including sheep and cattle, with natural implications of wool and hides, the subject of the impending interview might be almost anything. So Mr. Beadle was prepared to minister to his needs either as notary, wool and hides bought and sold, attorney, political boss or real estate. To be prepared along so many lines would make a certain amount of thought absolutely necessary. Mr. Beadle was thinking.

A cloud of dust kicked up by an ancient mule and the wheels of a light vehicle two hundred yards down the winding road gave notice that Homer Whaley was approaching.

While the venerable ranchman completes this last lap of his trip and ties the mule to the telephone post, an opportunity presents itself to furnish a word of explanation for the greeting he will sing out to Zachariah

Beadle. He is going to call him "Uncle Dudley." That, of course, should be explained. Zachariah had never been content with the small measure of fame which flows from deeds, so he sang his own praises by saying: "They can't fool your Uncle Dudley." And, indeed, it seemed that they couldn't, for half a dozen laws had been passed with no other purpose than to separate him from his control of the Mexican vote in what had come to be known as "his territory."

First an election law chased him and all other patriots or loiterers one hundred yards from any polling place; next they wouldn't let him bring his favorite voters to the polls in a conveyance; they refused him even the simple courtesy of paying the voters for time lost in reaching the ballot-box. And finally they hit upon the splendid idea of not permitting any election officer to assist a voter in making out his ballot except by speaking to him in the English language. The last was the worst jolt of all and cost Zachariah two days and two hundred cigarets of solid thought.

Then he came up smiling. On election day he would herd his voters at the legal one hundred yards from the polls, then select one voter and send him forward to vote. This citizen would receive from the officers of election a blank ballot and retire to the booth to scratch it. But he didn't scratch it. On the contrary, he folded it carefully and placed it in his pocket. As he left the polling place he dropped into the ballot-box a piece of wrapping-paper.

Returning to the herd he delivered into the eager hands of Zachariah the blank ballot he had so carefully preserved. Zachariah then marked this in a manner calculated to uphold the principles of a great nation and sent another voter to the polls with this marked ballot carefully stowed away in a pocket. On reaching the polling place this messenger would also receive a blank ballot. Likewise he would retire to the booth for ten seconds, emerge, drop his marked ballot into the box and bring the blank one back to Zachariah, to be marked for the third voter.

A process like this kept up from the time the polls open until they close will account for quite a number of votes. Anyway the only time Zachariah suffered political defeat was the year the reformers climbed up on the roof of a warehouse where Zachariah had quartered his patriots on the eve of election and treacherously threw ground red-pepper down through a hole in the roof. That outrage had resulted in a great scattering of Zachariah's political strength and his whole ticket went down to defeat. Since then, however, no one really had fooled Uncle Dudley; at least not in politics. Public admission of this fact was accordingly made by giving him as title the name of Uncle Dudley.

HOMER WHALEY has now tied his mule and cheerily sings out—"Howdy, Uncle Dudley."

"Howdy, Homer," replies Uncle Dudley. "Had any rain out your way?"

There had been none, as Uncle Dudley very well knew, but this was the polite thing to say.

"I want you to go and do some politicking for me," Homer announced, grinning, and somewhat embarrassed.

Uncle Dudley's eyes narrowed perhaps the thirty-second part of an inch, and he cocked his head to one side as a bird does when making inquiry.

"Tell you how it is," Homer continued, "so as all the cards will be on the table. I just leased the ranch to an oil company."

"How much did you get?" Uncle Dudley interrupted.

"Dollar an acre."

A rapid calculation in simple arithmetic showed that this would be twenty-eight thousand dollars. Uncle Dudley was becoming interested.

"I got a letter from my boy, Bill, in New York saying he is running for the Assembly. That's what they call the legislature up there. I thought at first it was some kind of church business. But he is running, he tells me in this letter. Now, you know, Uncle Dudley, I never have been able to do much for that boy. So I want to do something for him now. And I got an idea I'd like to be kind o' slick about it. I want you to get on the train and go up there and kind o' look things over and use your noodle and see what you can do for him. If it takes a few thousand all right. I don't know any one knows more politics than you do, and soon as I got his letter I says to myself, 'If Uncle Dudley was just there to help him he'd go over so easy he could go fishing on election day.' "

"Of course you know I can't take none of these local voters up there in my pocket," Uncle Dudley suggested.

"Sure, I know that, Uncle Dudley, but the way I figure it, you can sort of look around and spot the way to turn the trick. You see, I know Bill a lot better than you do and that boy is one of the honestest youngsters ever breathed. He's terrible that way. It wouldn't do no good for me to send him any money. He'd put down in his expense account every carfare on the way to make a speech, and a man that does that can't use any little money he happens to have handy for real election expenses.

"When he was in school he was all the time talking about Abraham Lincoln and things like that. Somehow I just figure he's the kind of a boy that would get beat. He's done well up there, in spite of that. I don't see how he ever done it with all the crooks they got up there, but in politics, I don't think he'd amount to much on the practical side. This may be the turning point in his career. You never can tell, Uncle Dudley, that boy might be President some day. What do you say to going up there?"

"Pretty hard to leave the business this time of the year," Uncle Dudley meditated aloud.

He looked up and down the deserted street in search of some one he might point out as a person requiring his services.

"Wouldn't be but four weeks," Whaley pleaded. "Would a thousand dollars cover it?"

Uncle Dudley felt a sudden prickly sensation run along his spine. One thousand dollars would not only cover it but hang down from the edges on all four sides.

"Tell you what, Homer," he said. "On a thing like this I'd like to have Sam Tupper along. You add two hundred for him and expenses and we are long gone."

Sam was in the rear part of the office examining a bill of lading for a shipment of hides. He was Uncle Dudley's man Friday in every enterprise from real estate to election day.

"Could you get away this afternoon?" Whaley asked.

"Yes."

"Then let's go over to the bank and I'll get you some money."

"Sam, chase home and get some clothes in a bag," Uncle Dudley called to his assistant. "We are going to New York on the afternoon train."

Sam's jaw dropped and he was rubbing his eyes with a dusty fist as the proud father of Bill led Uncle Dudley around the corner to the bank. Final admonitions, injunctions and encouragements having been imparted, the ranchman returned to his buggy and in it back to the ranch, a matter of twenty miles or five hours.

Uncle Dudley marched across from the bank to the post office.

"Dollar's worth o' stamps," he ordered.

Postmistress Armstrong blinked, then tore a sheet of stamps in half.

"We ain't going out of business, Uncle Dudley," she volunteered. "You could come around some other day."

"Going to New York," Uncle Dudley informed her importantly.

"They sell 'em up there, too," she replied with a sly smile.

"Big place, though," Uncle Dudley explained, "and I got too much business to be spending half my time looking for the post office. I'll be gone five weeks."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, leaving this afternoon."

"Well, well, well!"

And now, having made sure that every one in the town would know where he was going and how long he would be away, Uncle Dudley hurried to his own home where he packed a bag.

Beside the track where the station platform would have been if Santa Maria had had a station platform, Uncle Dudley encountered the faithful Sam Tupper and his bag. Sam was twenty-six years of age and strong enough to lift a bale of cotton on to a wagon unaided, in spite of being somewhat fat. He was clever at figures, clever in political campaigns, full of pranks, keenly interested in everything going on about him and bubbled happiness like a playful puppy.

"What are we going to do in New York, Uncle Dudley?" he asked.

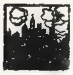
"Well, I reckon we are going to mix things up with the Republicans. What do you say to that?"

"Well, Uncle Dudley, I ain't never seen one but I'm game to give 'em a go-round. I reckon they wouldn't kill a fellow, even if they got him down."

Uncle Dudley grinned. There was a joyous fighting spirit about Sam Tupper that he liked. The young man's company would be worth his expenses even if he were not so useful.

The joy of conflict began to come over Uncle Dudley by the time he had selected a seat in the smoking-car of the train. This would be a kind of campaign he had never tasted before, a campaign between the Republicans and the Democrats. All of Uncle Dudley's battles had been fought inside the Democratic party. The big day for Uncle Dudley in Texas was not election day but the Democratic primaries. In Santa Maria the word Republican was a sort of super cuss word. If one merely wished to incite to riot or start a little fight, there was simple profanity suitable for the occasion, but if one were possessed by an abysmal hate which would probably last a life-time and include the second cousins of the person hated, he might call his enemy a Republican.

Going off on a train in this manner to fight Republicans had about it the glamour of a crusade against the Saracens. Uncle Dudley caressed his cigaret with parchment lips and grinned.



FOUR days later he and Sam Tupper emerged from a train far under ground and were led by a red-capped negro to a line of taxi-cabs above.

"Where to?" asked the driver.

"Fourteenth Street," Uncle Dudley replied promptly and with ease.

"Say, you kind o' know this town," Sam commented.

"Remember it well," Uncle Dudley replied. "I was here twenty-two years ago. Lot of good hotels down around Fourteenth Street. It's convenient to Tammany Hall, too. I reckon we'll have a lot of business down around Tammany Hall."

However, at Fourteenth Street Uncle Dudley couldn't find the hotels he remembered, so they cruised down Broadway until they came to one that looked like it might serve, and entered.

"Pretty swell place," whispered Sam as they paraded through the lobby.

"Better than the Simmons House back home," Uncle Dudley agreed, with a deprecating chuckle at comparing metropolitan luxury with Santa Maria's homely comforts.

The obliging bell-boy asked them four times if there was anything else he could do for them and then departed disappointed, but the two new arrivals were impressed by his great willingness to serve. The proprietor of the Simmons House never did anything like this. However, if any guest had handed the proprietor of the Simmons House a quarter for bringing up a suit-case he would probably have been thrown out. Sam opened his bag and was searching for his remaining clean collar when he heard Uncle Dudley remark, apropos of nothing so far as he could observe:

"Yes, sir, a country boy will do that every time. Never knew it to fail."

"Do what?" asked Sam, innocently.

"Put his bag on the dresser," Uncle Dudley informed him.

Whereupon Sam lifted the offending bag on to the bed, and resumed winnowing and threshing its contents in the hope of uncovering the clean collar.

While the process known to Sam as "slicking himself up" was in progress, Uncle Dudley examined a map of Manhattan, several small guide books, a World Almanac, and various other treasuries of information.

"I've got it," he announced, clutching the map in one hand and holding a point on it with his index finger. "Here's his district. We haven't got much time so we'll go down there this evening and see what we can pick up. Later on we'll call around at Tammany Hall. But I believe we can walk to his district. Yes, and we can walk all over it in an hour. There isn't much to it."

"If it's like the rest of this town," Sam commented, "it's mostly up and down and not much scattered around. Maybe the people live in layers same as they work in these buildings. Bet the houses are all stuck together."

"That's about the size of it," Uncle Dudley agreed. "Anyway, soon's we eat we'll go down there. First thing we want to find out about is how our man stacks up right now. I'll pick out a good corner where some people are passing and you just ask a lot of them. You know, sort of a straw-vote business. We'll kind o' get a line on the voters that way. I'll sort of range around and see if I can find any little headquarters or political clubs or anything like that. After a while I'll come back for you. Keep a tally on the back of an envelope or something. Try to get a few names and addresses of people who are for our man so I can talk to them. I want to know a few things before I talk to Tammany."

Sam nodded.

After a hurried meal they set out for the district indicated on the map, and were soon near the geographical center of it.

"Lots o' people out tonight," Uncle Dudley commented. "I reckon there's a speaking somewhere. Let's sort o' trail along with this herd and see where they go."

One block of trailing led to a mysterious stairway down which the herd scampered in droves after providing themselves with newspapers near the entrance.

"Good place," Uncle Dudley remarked. "Here's where you work for the next hour or so while I do some scouting."

Again Sam nodded assent, and before Uncle Dudley rounded the corner one citizen had been halted with a demand for information as to his leanings in the race for Assembly.

The scouting led rather aimlessly along various crowded sidewalks until fatigue and bewilderment brought it to a halt at a point where Uncle Dudley could look down into a basement restaurant. Every seat was taken. One waiter was rushing back and forth serving food while another walked among the guests carrying an enormous coffee pot from which he poured a dark liquid into cups. No steam rose from the cups. Uncle Dudley knew he was in a strange city but he had faith in coffee. In fact he felt sure that steam would rise from it wherever it might be. There was a friendly looking person standing on the curb in front of this restaurant. Uncle Dudley turned to him hopefully and said in his off-hand cordial manner—

"Howdy, citizen."

The citizen looked at him with cold curiosity.

"I'm up kind o' late for an old man," Uncle Dudley continued.

The citizen glanced at the restaurant clock and observed that the hour was nine.

"Thought you might be able to tell a lifelong Democrat where he could get a drink," Uncle Dudley hinted with a squint into the restaurant. Again the citizen looked suspicious.

"I'm a dry Democrat, not a dry agent," Uncle Dudley hastened to assure him.

"Go on down," the citizen said impatiently, pointing with his thumb at the restaurant. "You don't have to have my permission. They don't care whether you're a dry Democrat or a dry agent. They'll take care of you either way."

"Won't you join me?" Uncle Dudley asked.

For the first time the citizen mellowed and together they went down the stairs.

"Interested in politics?" asked Uncle Dudley, as something was poured into two cups.

"A little."

"Ever heard of Tammany?"

"Say, are you trying to kid me?"

"No. I just wanted to find out."

"Well, where were you brought up?"

"Texas."

"Oh, out West. Yes, I've heard of Tammany. I'm a member. That fellow over at the end table, facing the wall, is captain of this district."

"You mean the big *hombre* with a face like a muley cow?"

"Like a what?"

"Well, he looks like a muley cow. No offense, brother, but, honest Injun, don't he?"

"I don't know. I've never seen a cow."

"The —— you say!"

"That's what I said. If you want to meet the captain I'll introduce you."

Uncle Dudley did wish to meet the captain so they adjourned at once to the captain's table where some five minutes were expended in convincing Michael O'Shaughnessy, the captain, that there existed any such name as Zachariah Beadle while Uncle Dudley made no progress with the ancient name of O'Shaughnessy until it was written for him on the back of the menu card. In Santa Maria, if a man isn't a Mexican, his name is probably Smith, Wilson, Robinson, Green, Brown, Black or Wood.

"How's the campaign coming on?" Uncle Dudley asked.

"Same as usual."

"Well, brother, that don't mean a whole heap to me, seeing I just been here a few days. If you don't mind uncovering your hole card to a life-long Democrat and veteran of the Civil War; have the Democrats got a chance in this district?"

Michael O'Shaughnessy suffered a moment of uneasiness about the accuracy of his hearing and then laughed until he had to wipe tears from his eyes.

"Sometimes we feel so sorry for them we hand them four or five votes they didn't get," he explained. "This is a solid Tammany district. There ain't enough Republican voters in this district to deliver the mail."

Uncle Dudley beamed, and signaled for the cups to be refilled.

"You think Bill Whaley will be elected then?" he asked.

"Bill who?"

"Whaley."

"Never heard of him."

"He's the Democratic nominee for Assembly in this district."

"Who is?"

"Bill Whaley."

"If he is, I hope to drop dead."

"Then who is?"

"Patrick Murphy. That's his picture there on the wall."

Uncle Dudley examined the placard carefully, giving special attention to the number of the district, then drew out his maps and notations to compare them again. Beyond question this was the district. Uncle Dudley turned a puzzled countenance toward the kindly Patrick Murphy who smiled benevolently from the wall.

"The Democrats haven't had some kind of a split up this year?" he asked O'Shaughnessy.

"Not a chance."

"And you never heard of Bill Whaley?"

"He ain't even a member."

Uncle Dudley devoted himself to his cigaret.

"Say, where do you get that stuff about veteran of the Civil War? You ain't that old," O'Shaughnessy challenged.

Uncle Dudley laughed.

"You're pretty slick," he admitted. "I get away with that sometimes. No, the Civil War was nearly over when I was born but a lot of us old fellows lie about it. Homer Whaley started it in our town. He ran off to the war when he was twelve years old. First man in uniform he met was his pa. Homer got his breeches warmed with a piece of harness and came home next day. He never said nothing about it until he was sixty-seven years old but ever since then he's been a veteran of the Civil War."

"Looks like he'd lay off the war," O'Shaughnessy remarked. "The South got the razz, didn't it?"

"Got the what?"

"Raspberries."

"What about raspberries?"

"Don't you know raspberries?"

"No, I've never seen one."

"The —— you haven't!"

"But what have raspberries got to do with the Civil War?"

"Well, the South got the raspberries."

"No, the South got licked."

"That's what I'm saying."

"Oh yes. You mean something like the horse laugh."

"That's it."

"By the way, brother, where is the Calvary Baptist Church?" Uncle Dudley asked.

"Never heard of it. What would you do with it if you found it?"

"I want to find out how the preachers stand in this race."

"There's some kind of a settlement or something like that down here. I don't know what they are except they're all Protestants."

"Haven't you got some fire-eating political preachers down this way that get all hot under the collar about politics?" Uncle Dudley asked. "The kind that can reach right into Ecclesiastes and prove their man is right on the tariff?"

"No; they'd probably be against us anyway."

"They sure are lots of trouble," Uncle Dudley agreed. "They get after me right frequent. I like to get a line on them."

"What good does that do?" O'Shaughnessy asked.

"Well, it's my experience," Uncle Dudley replied, "that if you can get a fellow in politics plumb cross-eyed serious you can make him hang himself."

"Put her there," O'Shaughnessy yelled, extending a fat hand. "You ain't as dumb as you look."

"Can't fool your Uncle Dudley," was the response to this compliment.

Both drained their cups.

"I'm up kind o' late for an old man," Uncle Dudley announced, rising, "but I'm sure much obliged to meet you and I hope we'll meet again." Michael O'Shaughnessy extended a business card. "So, you're sure you don't know Bill Whaley?"

"Absotively."

"Good night, Mr. O'Shaughnessy."

"Good night, Texas."

UNCLE DUDLEY carefully picked his way back to the subway entrance where he found Sam Tupper engaged in spirited conversation with a young man whose progress toward Brooklyn had just been summarily arrested. Sam hailed Uncle Dudley, then addressed the Brooklynite.

"Say it again, mister," he requested.

"I said," the Brooklynite repeated, "that if you have no p'mit you better beat it because here comes the lawer."

"I get it all but that last word."

"The lawer."

"The Lord?"

"No, the lawer. Here comes a cop."

"Oh, a cop. Yes. Well, much obliged."

"G' night."

And the Brooklynite disappeared.

"What kind of talk is that?" Sam Tupper demanded of Uncle Dudley. "And that ain't all. He wanted to know why I don't go back to Texas and take care of my 'earl' wells. What kind of a foreigner is he? He said his name was Smith."

"Maybe he has a toothache?" Uncle Dudley suggested.

"No, he ain't got no toothache. He talks like that because he don't know no better. Makes him mad when you don't understand."

"Well, what does the tally-sheet show?" Uncle Dudley asked.

Sam Tupper extended the envelope on which his notations had been made, as follows:

Brooklyn	16
New Jersey	13
No Speeka	9
Didn't stop	4,000,000
For Whaley	1
	Mr. O. Shaw Nessy

Uncle Dudley read this unprecedented report until his cigaret burned his fingers.

"I judge," he said, while Sam choked his laughter, "that several persons failed to answer. The first two items are clear also. But who is 'No Speeka?' "

"I don't know who they are. That's all they said. I reckon they don't speak English but I've heard so many funny things tonight that I put the 'No Speekas' down."

"So you found only one man for Whaley?"

"That's all—and I think he gave me a fake name."

"Did you ask him to spell it?"

"No, but he pronounced it three times. That's it all right."

"The name," said Uncle Dudley, "is O'Shaughnessy. When we get back to the hotel I'll write it for you. What was his address?"

"Honest, Uncle Dudley, I was too wore out when I got the name to work on the address. He said it but I didn't get it. We can find out though. His brother is the Tammany captain of this district. He and the brother have got some kind of a war on and he's turned Republican but he's going to vote for Whaley."

"That's the first encouraging thing I've heard today," Uncle Dudley meditated aloud. "As near as I can make out our man ain't setting the river afire in this race. I wouldn't drop dead from surprize if I found there's some crooked work going on. I met the captain of this district——"

"Say, Uncle Dudley, you're a wonder," Sam interrupted. "How'd you do it?"

"I was invited to meet him."

"Invited! Knew about you, did he?"

"Well, he knows about me now."

"Told him a few things, did you, Uncle Dudley?"

"I kind o' let him see some samples. He admitted I wasn't dumb."

"No, nor deaf neither," Sam again interrupted proudly.

"This captain," Uncle Dudley resumed, "says he never heard of Bill Whaley and tried to tell me that some horse-faced cow thief named Patrick Murphy is the Democratic nominee for Assembly in this district."

"Gosh! Ain't they no slicker than that up here?" Sam exclaimed. "If that's a sample, I'm wiser than a tree full of owls. A nominee has got to be certified under the law. If that's all they know we can have them indicted before election."

"Sam, let's eat something before we go to bed," Uncle Dudley suggested. "Here's a fine looking restaurant with an American name, Childs."

"I'm game for groceries any time."

So they entered.

"What will you have?" the waiter asked.

"It's kind o' late," Uncle Dudley replied, "and I don't know what you've got left. What would you recommend for an old man on his way to bed?"

" 'Erster' stew."

"What kind of a stew?"

"It ain't no use, Uncle Dudley," Sam interrupted. "That's another one of them Brooklyn toothaches. You never will know what he's saying unless we get an interpreter. Here's where I get to the bottom of this. Waiter, call the boss."

"I said 'erster' stew," the waiter repeated, hoping that such innocent words had not given offense.

"I know —— well you did," Sam assured him, "and now I'm a-going to find out what it is."

"I think he means oyster stew," Uncle Dudley suggested.

"So do I, but— Say, you, call the foreman of this ranch before I——"

The waiter hurried away, returning with the manager.

"It's the Brooklyn accent," that official explained. "Across the river many people say 'ersters' for oysters, 'earl' for oil, 'goil' for girl. It's very simple when you understand it. Will you have oyster stew?"

"Yes—" from Uncle Dudley.

"But what makes them do it—" from Sam.

"I don't know, sir. I've never been over there."

"How long does it take?"

"Twenty minutes."

"How much does it cost?"

"Five cents."

"Travel don't charm you much, does it?"

"No, sir. If you'll excuse me, now?"

And the manager retreated.

"Two 'erster' stews?" the waiter asked.

"That's right," and Sam repeated, "two 'erster' stews. Bring me some cantaloupe, too."

"Yes, sir."

After laboriously excavating a spoonful of cantaloupe, Sam again summoned the waiter.

"I want you to go and get the seeds that came out of this," he requested.

"They'd be gone now. Sorry."

"Could you get me a whole cantaloupe like this, uncut?"

"Yes, sir."

"Get it, then."

"What do you want with it?" Uncle Dudley asked.

"This," Sam explained, pointing with his spoon, "is what the growers call a good shipper. It stands the trip to market. The seed man has been trying for three years to get my pa to raise some and he won't do it because he tried one and bent a pewter spoon on it. I want to show him that people buy 'em whether they can eat 'em or not. He raises those soft melons that are fine eating and poor business. I just want to show him that people that don't know no better will hack away at these things just as happy as if they had good sense."

"That's a very good idea," Uncle Dudley agreed.

A GALE was blowing the following morning but the sky was cloudless and the glare of sunshine, reflected from every object it touched, was almost painful to the eyes. The thermometer registered twenty-four degrees above zero, a beautiful, crisp, Autumn day, marred only by the wind. Uncle Dudley looked out the window and warmed his eyes. Such a day in Santa Maria would mean a temperature not below eighty-five. Cold weather comes to Santa Maria only in spells locally known as Northers, always accompanied by low-hanging clouds and rain.

"It's turned hot," Uncle Dudley informed Sam who came to the window to confirm the report.

"I'm kind o' sorry," Sam said. "I was hoping to see some ice or maybe some snow. Must be awful hot. This steam heat ought not to be on. I'm going to open a window and get some air in here."

Suiting the action to the word, Sam flung up the broad window with a bang and then fell down more from astonishment than the force of the wind. Uncle Dudley who was in his underwear reached the bathroom in two hops and slammed the door.

"What happened?" he yelled.

Sam was now convulsed with laughter, but managed to close the window.

"It's all right now. Come on out," Sam replied.

The bathroom door opened one inch disclosing a shivering knee and one questioning eye.

"That just ain't right," Sam declared, looking at the sky, and apparently addressing the Deity. "Man ought to have some clouds and rain to put him on notice about anything like that. Enough to kill a fellow. Hit me right in the stomach and caved me in. I fell down. Just look at that sky, Uncle Dudley. Why a farmer would start out to plant his cotton on a day like this and freeze to death before he got the mule hitched. That ain't right."

"It's a kind of a dry norther, I reckon," Uncle Dudley mumbled, "but, horned-toads and lizards, ain't it a bushy-tailed wolf?"

"Must be sixty degrees below zero," Sam agreed. "When it hit me on the end of my nose I saw stars. What are we going to do today, Uncle Dudley? Do you want me to play cat again at one of those holes in the ground?"

"No, Sam. I've been thinking about this campaign nearly half the night and it seems to me that we will need more definite information than we now have before we can be of much service. My instructions were to operate without the knowledge of the candidate and while that is what we will eventually do, still I feel that it will be necessary to have a talk with him. It is now seven o'clock. He will probably be at breakfast so we will eat and then go to see him."

"How are we going to find him?"

"I found his name and address in the telephone directory. The jitneys seem to be running in spite of this weather and we ought to get there before eight o'clock."

"Well, Uncle Dudley, I hope he don't offer us some 'ersters' or say he lives in New Joisey."

"You'll find him a gentleman, Sam. His father is a life-long Democrat and veteran of the Civil War. I remember when Bill cast his first vote."

Fifteen minutes later Sam was examining the foot-warmer in a taxicab as it speeded toward the home of William Howard Whaley. It was the first he had ever seen. The home was one of a block of fine old houses around which a tenement district had later grown up. A maid responded to Uncle Dudley's ring and, because of the weather, permitted them to enter the hallway while she carried the message upstairs. The message was—

"Two gentlemen to see Mr. Whaley about politics."

There was no need to transport the reply. It could be heard all over the house. To be exact, it was—

"Tell the blackmailers to go to ——"

In view of the finality of this message the maid was for pushing the two callers back into the weather but Sam's weight promised difficulty and he seized the opportunity to try a second message. It was—

"Sam Tupper and Uncle Dudley of Santa Maria, Texas."

Bill Whaley washed the shaving-soap from his face and came downstairs in a dressing-gown.

"Old bald-face Sam," he cried, "and Uncle Dudley! Why, you old horse thief. I haven't seen you for fifty years and here you are younger than ever. Aren't you ever going to get old and respectable?"

The maid backed out of the hall and took up a position near the telephone so she could summon the police when directed.

"I don't reckon I ever will get old," Uncle Dudley replied. "The Mexicans say some men just gradually dry up and turn into burros, and I reckon that's what I'm going to do. I believe the Mexicans are right about it because any one can look at a burro's face and tell he was born old."

"What on earth possessed you to say you wanted to talk politics?" Whaley asked.

"Well, Bill, we do want to talk politics."

"But I don't know a thing about politics."

"Right there is the beginning of wisdom. Do you greet all your constituents with what we got?"

"Yes."

"Right there is the beginning of ignorance."

"But Uncle Dudley, I don't give a —— about politics."

"You're a candidate, ain't you?"

"After a fashion."

"Mean you feel licked before you start?"

"Certainly."

"That won't help you none," Sam commented.

"But I haven't got a chance in the world," Bill protested. "I'm simply on the ticket. That's all. This is a solid Tammany district."

"Would they knife the Democratic nominee?" Uncle Dudley bristled at the very thought of such an outrage.

"Answering your question, I think they would. At least they have done so. But that has nothing to do with my case."

"Bill!" Uncle Dudley exclaimed. "You don't mean to tell me you've gone and got the sour-face and turned Socialist?"

"No, Uncle Dudley. I am a Republican and have been for ten years."

Uncle Dudley groaned. Sam Tupper was pop-eyed and incredulous.

"After keeping it secret from your old pa all these years, Bill, why couldn't you let him go to his grave without knowing it? Why, Bill, you always went to Sunday School when you was a boy. Why did you go and get the nomination and make the whole mess public? What good did it do you?"

"None, except the honor."

"What! The honor of being a Republican nominee?"

"Certainly."

"Where's my hat?"

"Now, Uncle Dudley, don't be childish. I told you I didn't wish to talk politics. Stay for breakfast, and——"

"We've had our breakfast, Mr. Whaley. It is now after eight o'clock. Mr. Tupper and I will say good day."

"Oh, all right, doggone it, only I would like to—but if you feel that way about it, good day."

"We feel that way about it," Uncle Dudley reiterated as they retreated toward the door.

Safely back in the taxicab, Sam said—

"Now what?"

"As soon as we reach the hotel I must send a telegram," Uncle Dudley announced.

And that is what he did. The telegram follows:

Bill is Republican nominee. I await your further instructions.

Late that afternoon the further instructions came as follows:

Take a dozen eggs to his first speaking. Then come home.

"That's what I thought," was Uncle Dudley's comment. "Well, Sam, we start back this afternoon if the trains ain't knocked out by this weather. Don't forget your cantaloupe. Bill wouldn't make much of a legislator nohow. While I don't know anything about Patrick Murphy, if he looks like his picture he won't ruin the scenery wherever he goes."

THE JUDGEMENT TREE OF DANIEL BOONE

by Raymond W. Thorp

THE judgment tree of Daniel Boone is an old American elm, and stands on the old Boone homestead at Darst's Bottom, Femme Osage, Missouri. Femme Osage was the name given by Daniel Boone to a creek crossing the farm because an Osage Indian woman was drowned there. The village, which sprang into being soon after, took its name from the creek, and for a time was a thriving little community, but about fourteen years ago the government removed the post-office from Femme Osage, and the village died a natural death. The famous tree is about five miles east of the village, and five miles west of the town of Defiance, on the Femme Osage Creek road, and very close by the stone house which was built by Nathan Boone, the youngest son of the old pioneer, and only forty or fifty feet south of the place formerly occupied by the log house of the latter. The old elm is sixty-five feet high, and its main fork begins three feet from the ground. Each branch measures nine feet in circumference at the beginning of the fork. The main trunk is sixteen feet six inches in circumference two feet from the ground. One branch faces the west and the other the east, the one to the west being badly decayed, with large hollows reaching into the heart of the tree; the other, however, being in very good condition.

When Boone first moved to Missouri, he for a time made his home in Marthasville, but not being satisfied in that place he moved to the Femme Osage country. Soon after going there, settlers began flocking to the vicinity, and he was elected syndic of the district, which office made him the foremost man in the community. One of his duties was to hold court from time to time, passing on both civil and Federal cases. Sometimes offenders were sentenced to a certain number of lashes on the bare back. After the United States Government obtained control of the region, the jurisdiction of the Territorial court was extended to include the district presided over by Boone, and a courthouse was erected at St. Charles.

The habit of appealing to Boone and accepting his opinions without question had, however, become too firmly fixed in the minds of the settlers to admit of their adopting the new law arrangement. Therefore, as long as Boone lived he continued to hold court under the old elm tree in front of his house, and here the troubles and grievances of his neighbors were adjusted according to the principles of frontier common sense, and until the stump of this old patriarch of trees has fallen into decay and had its last vestige removed, it will always be known as the Daniel Boone Judgment Tree.

EXACTLY

By Albert Richard Wetjen

Author of "The Fantom Honor," "I'll Show 'Em'," etc.

HIS eyes were coldly blue. His face was lean and square-jawed. A crisp black mustache graced his upper lip. The blue-peaked uniform cap that covered his black hair was set at a slight angle to one side. His white collar was spotless, so was his knit tie. Not a speck marred his blue uniform suit. Even his walk was exact—every pace just so large, never hurried, never slackened. The mate approached him as he stood on the bridge of the *Water Witch* and coldly surveyed the hazy sky.

"You wanted me, sir?"

The captain turned and wiped his mustache with a lean forefinger. He frowned and said—

"I do."

The mate waited, a little wiry man, sandy-haired, wrinkled of face. He scratched his long jaw and looked puzzled.

"The log, Mr. Salmon, under the date of the twenty-seventh. I found in your writing the word 'uneasy' spelt with two e's. The page was disgracefully smudged. Gives the owners a bad impression. Looks slovenly. Don't let it occur again."

The mate stopped scratching his jaw and scowled. He muttered, "Yessir," sullenly. He was a tough man, illiterate, rather belonging on the poop of some windjammer than on the bridge of the *Water Witch*, crack packet of the Green Star Line. He caught the second mate grinning at him from the bridge-wing and cursed.

"What's that?" said the captain, half-turning.

The mate grimaced. "I said dirty weather, sir."

"It looks like it." The captain resumed his inspection of the sky.

The mate moved away, wrathful, pulling his peaked cap viciously over his eyes.

The captain walked across the bridge and entered the chart-room. The second mate, whose watch it was, lounged across to the helmsman and winked.

"Old man's worried," he said.

The helmsman grunted and emptied tobacco-juice into the cuspidor at his feet. Idly he turned the wheel-spokes. He said disgustedly—

"'E's a nut."

The second mate grinned and entered on a conversation that concerned a girl in Bombay and a little widow in Port Said.

In the chart-room the captain wiped his mustache with his forefinger and muttered with impatience. A framed photograph of the *Water Witch* caught his eye. The picture was suspended by a piece of wire from a nail driven into the bulkhead over the chart-table. Due to some irregular attachment of the wire the frame had a habit of working to one side. The captain straightened it, stepping back to see that it was exactly in line with the bottom shelf of the little bookcase below which it hung. He straightened it on an average of four times a day.

Bending over a chart he toyed with a pair of compasses for a while and then made an entry in the bridge-log. A thumb-tack, lying point down on the deck, attracted him. He picked it up and restored it to a half-filled box of tacks on the bench. Frowning he stepped out on the bridge again. A warning cry, almost a scream, came from the fo'csle-head. The captain stopped. Every one of his five feet seven inches grew tense. Mechanically he wiped his mustache. He heard the second mate race from the wheel to the engine telegraphs. He heard an order snap out simultaneously with the telegraph jangle. Then he moved forward, his steps exact, unhurried.

He asked coldly—

"What is it?"

The second mate, craning over the for'ard bridge-dodger, twisted round. His face was white.

"Wreckage! Ahead, sir. Looks like——"

The *Water Witch* jarred, checked in mid-career, veered to one side and sloshed heavily on her keel. The second mate cursed.

He said—

"Grazed it, by——!"

The captain, hardly grasping matters yet, moved to the bridge-wing and peered overside.

Like a wraith, her battered decks some two fathoms below the glassy surface, he saw a lost ship sway by. She skimmed the *Water Witch's* hull. He paced inboard, said, "Hard a port," calmly to the helmsman, pushed the second mate's hand from the telegraph and rang down, "Stop."

He observed coldly—

"I hope nothing hits the propeller. I perceive you haven't sewn on that button I told you about."

He gazed frigidly at the other's white uniform jacket. The captain alone wore blue serge in the tropics.

The second mate winced, relaxed back from the dodger and wiped his forehead. The purely trivial nature of the reprimand at such time acted like a cold water shock to his system.

He said, a little strained—

"Shall I have the carpenter take a sounding, sir?"

"By all means. Ah, I was afraid——"

The deck reeled. The *Water Witch* attempted to twist upon herself. There came a faint clamor from the engine-room. Doors slammed. A running of feet. From for'ard the bos'n's voice.

"All hands on deck!"

Again the sound of running feet. Pots jumbled with a crash in the galley amidships.

The captain wiped his mustache with a steady forefinger and frowned. He gazed straight ahead. Icy fingers grew round his heart and groped at the pit of his stomach. He had never lost a ship. It was his boast. It was his pride. What if this—he wondered vaguely what ship the derelict had been. To strike in a calm sea and in full daylight. They would call it negligence. The man at the wheel spat aside and the tiny noise, heard for a fractioned second above the rest, brought the captain to himself. His iron pride returned. He wiped his mustache, straightened his tie.

Shoes clattered on the bridge companion. The fourth engineer crossed the deck, half-dressed, breathless.

"Propeller gone, sir," he stated. He took another hitch in his belt. His hands were steady. His eyes danced. He was young, and this was adventure. "The chief sent me."

The captain surveyed him coldly.

"That will be all," he said.

He turned his back and went into the chart-room. He noted the time and jotted it down on a scribbling pad. He gathered certain papers together and slipped a rubber band around them. It was best to be ready. He frowned and muttered irritably as he noticed the picture of the *Water Witch.* The shocks must have jarred it.

He straightened it and stepped back, critical to see that it was in line with the bottom shelf of the little bookcase. The carpenter darkened the doorway.

"Forehold's leakin' a bit. Propeller's gone. Four feet of water 'midships!

"I know." The captain nodded. "Watch and see if it rises."

The carpenter disappeared. The mate came up the companion, followed by the second. The third mate appeared soon after. Men were running everywhere.

The captain wiped his mustache. He flickered a fragment of lint from his cuff.

"See to the boats, Mr. Salmon. Provisions, water, compasses, gear. Lower as far as the rail—Mr. Beck—" to the third mate—"get the collision-mats from the forepeak."

The officers went away. The second mate remained with the captain. The haze that had been in the sky all day appeared to thicken and darken. Bad luck, a storm coming at this time. But it might be worse. Ship apparently in no immediate danger of sinking. The captain bent over the chart-table wrote on the scribbling pad:

> Struck derelict five minutes after seven bells in afternoon watch.

He added latitude and longitude from memory, to be checked up later. He muttered:

"Five days out from Colombo. We should have been in Cape Town——"

He frowned and wrote:

> Propeller gone. All precautions being taken.

He laid down the pencil. On the bridge he flung a curt word to the second mate and then made for the main deck. He found the few passengers the *Water Witch* carried milling about outside the saloon door. Their voices were shrill, hoarse some of them. The men were white-faced, the women wide-eyed and trembling. Wreck! And under the burning sun. The captain paced through them, cold and unshaken. He reassured them. Danger? He essayed a frigid smile. He had never lost a ship. The icy fingers grew around his heart and groped in the pit of his stomach. The little muscles behind his jaw tightened. He went on so calm, men wondered.

THE expected bad weather did not mature. Night came hot and starry. The sky marched over the horizon, leaving the dark vault clear for the moon. It was due about midnight. From the stars beams of light dropped on to the water, so glassy that it seemed covered with oil. Occasionally flying-fish whirred across the shallow swells, looking like silver cigars. Once some great sea mammal set up a threshing away on the quarter. Probably a whale attacked by swordfish.

The captain paced the bridge, port to starboard, starboard to port. His hands were clasped behind his back, his head bent a trifle. The third mate lounged in the bridge-wing with a pair of night-glasses and kept his watch. The other officers were busy on the main deck. A helmsman was at the wheel. He was of no real use but exactness was the law on the *Water Witch.* The pulsing of the pumps could be felt underfoot. Water splashed from the exhausts.

The captain unclasped his hands. He wiped his mustache and muttered to himself. The wireless was connected with two ships. One was altering her course to pick up the *Water Witch* by dawn. The other was keeping in touch in case anything went wrong. It was likely to. The pumps could not quite cope with the inflow. The sea was stealing into the holds faster than it could be removed.

Crude collision-mats of rope and canvas were already wrapped round the ship, under her keel. They did not seem to be doing much good. Electric clusters shone over the foredeck. Hurricane-lamps danced aft in the windless air. Below the bridge, outside the saloon, the passengers gathered and gossiped, uneasiness under their low voices. The few women were slightly hysterical. Long and slow the swell lifted the *Water Witch*, barely shaking her. Aimlessly she boxed the compass and wallowed over the sea.

A dark figure came up the companion and crossed to the master. It was the second engineer, a little fat man with a pasty complexion and protruding blue eyes.

"I want to show you something."

He touched the captain's arm with a hand that trembled.

He chewed his red mustache and coughed nervously. The captain stopped his pacing and frowned.

He said frigidly—

"I've told you before, Mr. Marlowe. You have no business on the bridge."

The engineer choked. He tore at his jacket-collar. His eyes bulged.

"Exceptional case, sir——"

The captain checked him—

"Don't let it occur again."

The engineer said in a muffled voice—

"Will you come aft, sir?"

"What is it?"

"There's something wrong down Number Four. The engine-room's full of smoke."

"Really?"

The captain's heart leaped, checked and then beat hard. He wiped his crisp mustache with a steady forefinger and his eyes narrowed. "I'll see to it," he finished coldly.

Baffled, the engineer moved to the companion and cursing softly went down.

The captain followed soon after, pacing evenly, stopping now and then for a word with some passenger, or a sharp order to some sailor. He reached Number Four hatch and called quietly to two seamen to kick out the wedges and lift a corner. There was no doubt what was wrong. Smoke billowed up. The seamen cursed and fell back coughing. The captain dabbed his mouth with a white handkerchief and frowned.

"Send the mate to me," he ordered.

He wiped his mustache and stared at the deck thoughtfully. A wisp of rope yarn on the white planking caught his eye. He frowned again and picked it up, crumpling it to a fluffy ball. The mate came running.

"Good Gawd, sir! What c'n 'ave started——"

The captain said coldly—

"See the decks are kept free from rubbish." He opened his hand to show the rope yarn. Then he inclined his head to the open hatch corner. "Fire I believe, Mr. Salmon. Have some men rig the hoses."

The mate gurgled something and then leaned over the hatch combing. He fell back choking, flung a gasping order to one of the seamen and faced the captain again.

"Guess this is the finish if it's bad, sir."

The captain wiped his mustache and brushed a streak of white from his sleeve. He admitted, "Very likely," in an indifferent tone. The mate stared at him through the dimness and scratched his jaw. The bos'n came up with half a dozen men, carrying rolled hoses.

"She's bad," the bos'n grunted, after examination. "If we try t' smother 'er she'll blow th' 'atches off."

The captain walked away. His throat was tight. Fire as bad as that? The mate looked after him and snorted. The bos'n straightened from connecting a hose, gave some profane orders to his men and then jerked a thumb at the master's back.

"Wot's struck 'im now? Ain't 'e got any nerves?"

The mate shrugged. "Wouldn't think so. Cold-blooded and officious as——!"

"Jest bawled me out this mornin' fer 'aving a spot o' paint on th' deck near th' main shrouds." The bos'n was grieved. The mate was sympathetic.

"I heard about that paint too," he said grimly.

The captain went to his room and gathered some things together in a little canvas ditty-bag. He took it up to the chart-room and put it with the papers he had already laid aside. So far there was no danger. The ship was sinking but slowly. The fire did not appear to be in control just yet. And a relief-ship was making for the *Water Witch* and would arrive by dawn. The boats were ready for launching, provisioned and well-equipped. Everything had been done.

The captain dropped to the chart-room settee and wiped his mustache. His forefinger shook just the merest trifle this time. He removed his cap and laid it carefully by his side. A bleak look appeared in his cold eyes. He had been to sea twenty-five years without a mishap. He had always brought his ships home. And now he was master of a lost vessel. For lost the *Water Witch* almost certainly was, there could be no doubt. Between fire and the sea little could save her.

He knew his employers would hardly condemn him for failure. The thing was so obviously a pure accident. An act of God they might call it. God? He remembered an old tired captain who had told him once that God was not a sailor. He wondered. Pure accident, striking a derelict. When told on shore though it would sound foolish. Sea calm and in daylight. But still, he had such a record behind him there was every likelihood of his getting scot free. Which was more than the average master mariner could hope for. It paid after all to build up a reputation. Decidedly.

But the captain found no consolation. No acquittal by any inquiry board could mend a broken pride. Foolish pride? Perhaps. The sort of thing that made a kinky-haired cannibal strut and boast of his pile of dried heads? Very likely. But man was so made. And pride was one of the pistons that worked the machine. He muttered with impatience at such fruitless wanderings. It was his boast he had never lost a ship or incurred any unnecessary expense for repair work through negligence. He was wont to remind young officers of that when reprimanding them. They thought him foolishly exact, with a passion for detail. He knew. His heart and the pit of his stomach was cold. How they would laugh.

He held his head in his hands and rocked sidewise in his pain.

"God! Oh, God!" he moaned.

Warm wells seemed to burst with a rush inside him. He never had dreamed they existed. Self-pity swept him; then pity and an understanding for those men he had known who had lost their ships. He had looked on them as incompetents. He felt better. After a while he stood up and replaced his cap, careful it was at the right angle. He turned to go and the picture of the *Water Witch*, crooked again, caught his eye. With a muttered imprecation he straightened it and brought it level with the bookcase shelf. He was flung violently forward as the deck heaved.

The roar of an explosion hammered at the night. The captain steadied himself and trembling groped for the doorway. He heard men shouting; a scream. Red light blazed the sea and the ship, casting sharp shadows on the foredeck. Clearly then came the whining of boat falls.

Shoes pounded. A crackling noise grew. Blistered and singed and half-naked the mate came on the bridge. He was breathless and staggering, pawing with his hands as though blind. The captain caught him by one shoulder.

"Up! Up! Every —— thing," stammered the mate. "Blew th' hatches clean—Knew we 'ad somethin' explosive down there. Didn't think—" He choked and steadied, "What next, sir," he asked, calmer.

The captain frowned and wiped his mustache. The cold fingers were at his heart and stomach again. He set his teeth.

"Much damage?"

The mate tried to grin. "Whole —— side split open. Phooey!" He coughed hackingly.

The captain shook him.

"Get along to your boat, Mr. Salmon. You're in a bad way— You'll find boracic ointment good for those blisters. Be sure to rub it well in and not bandage too tightly."

Abruptly he left the mate and moved to the companion. His throat was tight again. He had never understood before why men got excited and ran. He understood now. He wanted to run himself. Desperately he wanted to run. He was almost tempted. But habit was too strong. In spite that inside his shell he was grown suddenly human he stopped, on the main deck outside the saloon, and picked up a torn pajama-coat some one had dropped. He threw it overboard.

Aft was inferno. The smell of oil was very strong. There had been some drums in the shelter-deck the captain remembered. He could see no one about. From the fiddley-deck above he heard men's voices and the creaking of fall-blocks. Lowering the boats. Too scared some of them to await orders. Even the passengers had gone above. But one expected it of them. Fire belched from the open hatch, blistering all things.

A dark form in a corner of the engineer's house caught the captain's eye. Some one the explosion had knocked senseless. He bent his head and went forward. The heat made him cry out. Coming back he ran, the body of the fireman he had found over his shoulder. The glare dazed him. He stumbled away to where a boat hung level with the main deck rail from its davits above.

Men had already crowded it. It was being lowered to the water. Two women huddled on the bottom boards. The captain pitched the fireman beside them. The man would recover presently.

"Plenty of boats," said the captain, coughing, groping for the rail and steadying himself.

THE second mate found him on the bridge twenty minutes later. The sea was ruddy with the glare now. All the stern of the *Water Witch* was ablaze. With the cessation of the pumps—the men below had deserted the stoke-hold and engine-room at the first explosion—the sea had flooded for'ard and 'midships unchecked, save by the flimsy collision-mats. The vessel was down by the head, the water well over the hawse-holes. The moon, peering like a silver scimitar over the sea rim, promised a wonderful night.

"All away, sir," said the second mate, flipping the sweat from his forehead. The captain, in the chart-room gathering his papers and ditty-bag together, looked up and frowned.

"Passengers gone?" he asked coldly.

"All gone, sir—every one bar the wireless and y'self."

"You have counted them?"

"Yessir."

"I shall probably have something to say later on to yourself and the third mate for abandoning ship without orders. It is——"

The captain stopped. He was aware that the warm wells had burst in him again, sweeping him, giving him understanding.

He recommenced huskily, in a mellow deep voice:

"—— it all, Jackson! It's all right. Get away and take the wireless operator." It came with a rush: "We're all men at the last, the same pain and the same in pride. I—" He stopped, aware the second mate was regarding him with astonishment. "I'll be along in a few minutes," he finished quietly.

The second mate went away mystified. The captain slumped to the settee and stared blankly before him. Mechanically he wiped his mustache. He grew aware of a reddish scorch-stain down one side of his creased trousers and he tried to rub it off. Realizing what he was doing he laughed harshly and stopped.

All these years he had never lost a ship. He wiped his mustache again. It felt strange— He coughed, choking as a stray smoke-wisp reached him. He rose to straighten the picture and then turned as a shouting from the main deck attracted him. Couldn't they get the boats away without his presence. He felt aggrieved.

The second mate bundled the wireless operator in the last boat and leaned against the main deck rail, waiting impatiently. The purser called from below, "Hurry up!" his thin voice shaky. The second mate scowled.

"Aw, quit!" he said and took out a crumpled cigaret from his pocket. His fingers were steady when he lighted it. His eyes were quite calm. Poor —— of a skipper. The loss of his ship must be driving him crazy. Still, he half-way deserved it. He'd been confounded chesty for years now about his wonderful spotless career. Never made a mistake, he said. This'd be a lesson to him. Though of course there wasn't a chance he'd get broken for a pure accident. Derelicts were worse than rocks because they drifted. Rocks stood still and you could steer clear of them. Crazy about details, the skipper. Any one would think he commanded a crack Western Ocean packet instead of a fair-sized freighter that carried a dozen or so passengers.

"What's keepin' th' old man?" wailed the purser, one eye on the leaping flames. The little nodules of sweat on his scared face glistened plainly.

The second mate shrugged and looked to where the other boats were gathered in a group some distance away, awaiting the end.

"He'll be 'long soon."

At that moment the captain was rocking sideways, his head in his hands, the chart-room settee creaking under him, muttering "God! Oh, God!" in a stifled voice. But when he came to the boat a few minutes later he was perfectly calm and dignified. Pride wrapped him again. Even in his scorched clothing and with his singed face and mustache he looked commanding.

"All ready?" he asked frigidly.

The second mate nodded, tossed away his cigaret and went down the pilot-ladder hand-over-hand to the slowly lifting and falling boat. The captain followed. The boat pushed off, the master in the stern sheets holding the tiller-lines, his papers and ditty-bag at his feet. The boat joined the little silent flotilla.

The captain cleared his throat.

"We'll have relief by dawn," he stated, the warm mellow note creeping under his voice once again. The second mate, in the bows, blinked at him and wondered.

The purser, huddled near the captain, said, "I hope so," in a querulous shaking tone. Silence fell for a long time. On the *Water Witch* the flames roared red and high and her steel sides glowed.

The captain uttered a sharp exclamation. The purser roused himself and looked up.

"What's the matter, sir?"

The second mate craned forward to hear. An idea was persisting within him that the cold man was human somewhere deep down.

The captain wiped his mustache and frowned.

"I forgot to straighten that picture," he said.

THE SLAVES OF THE LAMP

by Alanson Skinner

UNDER the wild aurora, where shimmering ghost-fires glow,
Where the sunbeams glitter at midnight
On everlasting snow;
Where the musk ox browse on the tundra,
Where the seal and the killer whale
Play hide-and-seek in the northern ice
And frost fiends ride on the gale.
Country of cold eternal! Home of the Eskimo!
It is there, if you seek, you will find us
As far as a man can go.

Slaves of the lamp called Science,
Forever and ever we roam,
And God's blue sky is our roof-tree
And God's green earth our home.

Astride of the hot equator, where the tropic jungles steam,
Where the gorgeous wings of the butterflies
Slip softly by as a dream;
Where death lurks grim in the palm-fronds,
Where fever basks with the flowers,
Where the jaguar prowls, and the hell-mouthed snakes
Are near companions of ours.
Little brown savage headsmen; blow-guns, poison and spears.
They have no power to harm our kind,
We, who have lost our fears!

Slaves of the lamp called Science!
We carry no gun nor knife.
He need not heed the arrow's speed
Who has nothing to lose but his life!

Why do we travel, you ask me? Why do we wander far?
Go, beg the comets to tell you the why of the falling star.
Whistle the ranging coyote, speak to the startled deer,
And your answer from these will be but the breeze
That blows in your empty ear!

Slaves of the lamp called Science!
And oh, but our task is hard.
It has brought us nothing of riches
But foreheads wrinkled and scarred.
We are the earth's last Gipsies
We are her roaming seed,
When her uttermost covert is ended
Then falls the last of our breed.
But we live and die for a purpose
Who can gainsay us, then,
Who breathe for the joy of creating
The understanding of men?

NECKLACES and DAN WHEELER

A FOUR-PART STORY

Part III

by John I. Cochrane

Author of "Sled Wheeler and the Nameless Order," "Sled Wheeler and the Diamond Ranch," etc.

The first part of the story briefly told in story form.

"I WAS looking for you, Mac."

Stuart McLeod, down and out—New York City, fresh from the penitentiary where he had served sentence on a charge of which he was guiltless, turned and faced Dan "Sled" Wheeler.

For the next few hours things flowed smoothly for Mac. Dan, needing a helper in apprehending the "Spark Gang," diamond thieves, provided clothes, food and peace of mind for Mac, whom he had saved from a fight with a German manufacturer. Mac was having the same trouble that falls to the lot of most ex-convicts. With Mac's honest admission of his residence for the past few months the German had set up a great hue and cry. It was then that Dan Wheeler had put in an appearance.

An evening at the theater, dodging a detective, brought Mac and Dan face to face with Mary Mason and Piet Van Twiller. Mary Mason was McLeod's uncle's charge, and to Mac she was The Girl. Mac did not speak.

Leaving the theater, Dan laid out a plan for Mac. Somehow Dan knew that somebody was out to "get" Mac, and that if he was steered into East Nineteenth Street they would see action. Mac was to go alone, Dan to follow in a cab. Sure enough when he turned into the dark street, a cab, not Dan's, followed. At the same instant he saw a big bruiser in a red sweater almost upon him. He was trapped—a man before and behind!

In a few minutes the fight was over. Dan was leaning over him.

"Mac! Are you hurt?"

"No. Just a bump. He said—" pointing to the Red Sweater, who was lying in the gutter—"he said, 'Kill the —— ——!'"

"He said that?"

A swift resolution for revenge passed through Dan. He turned toward the assailant.

"Who's paying you for this?"

"Matty de Mick," admitted the man, whimpering.

That was enough for Dan. The man was hastily warned to get out of town. A cab was hired. Matty's joint on the Bowery was the destination.

"GOOD evening, Matty."

Wheeler stepped forward holding out his hand, a slim, effeminate hand, but one that held merciless strength.

"Keep off!" rasped the tough. "You beat me up when I was a kid, but you don't wok that again."

In the moment of the hand-clasp Wheeler had twisted the gangster around and pinned his arm against his back.

"Now, Matty, who paid you for this?" he asked.

They got the information that a masked man living under the Russian consulate had been the instigator of the attack on Mac. Dan's warning to Matty to leave the boy alone in the future was physical and painful. The pair left the Bowery joint, with Matty unconscious on the table. Dan had broken Matty's arm with his own two hands.

On their way up-town Wheeler and McLeod came across Piet Van Twiller and Reginald Willing, a former friend of Mac's, Piet happily and helplessly drunk. With a promise to call on him some day at the Grand Union Hotel, Mac helped Reggie into a carriage with Piet. The two drove off. Dan, ready for anything, gave orders to his cabman to take Mac and him to an address in Pell Street. They stopped before a shop bearing the sign—

Huen Ling, Importer.

THEY were ushered into the presence of a tall, magnificent, dignified Oriental.

He spoke with the purest English:

"You came just in time, Mr. Wheeler. I have been out on business that concerns both of you—if this is Mr. Stuart McLeod. Yes, I see the family resemblance."

After a recital of their experiences, Huen Ling told them of the operations of the Spark Gang, and added that in detecting the gang there were two serious complications—one, that the contents of

---

"Necklaces and Dan Wheeler," copyright, 1924, by John I. Cochrane.

certain papers inimical to the diplomatic circles in Washington must not be made known.

"And the other?" asked Dan.

"The other is perhaps not so much a complication as an incentive. Did you know that Alan McLeod—" Mac's wealthy uncle—"was a close friend, years ago, of your friend and instructor, Slater?"

To Dan's affirmative, he went on—

"Then I do not need to press my argument?"

Dan's hoarse whisper roused McLeod, who was falling to sleep from exhaustion.

"I'll get him if we both live. But what's *your* reason?"

Mac could not hear the reply. But he heard the Chinaman add—

"It is now your duty."

THE next Mac knew was that it was daylight. He was back in his hotel. He had slept through a day and a night. Dan hastily showed him the newspapers, in which was an account of McLeod's unjust sentence and service in the penitentiary.

"But," he said, "there is a better story than that. The 'Mysterious Israfil' was robbed of his diamonds last night. Explosion and fire; diamonds walked off in the confusion. Regular Spark Gang job. Israfil is a hypnotist, and lectures to some of the smart set just now on it as well as on jujutsu, and he does the stunts himself. I think he is a bluff, and I know the Jap wrestling, so we ought to be able to call him. But let that go. Piet called this morning and said that you were to see your uncle immediately after breakfast."

TWO hours later Mac faced his uncle, whom he had not seen for years. He knew very little about Alan McLeod, except rumors. Somewhere he had picked up intimations to the general effect that his relative, now in his old age and very ill, was regarded as an eccentric possessing great wealth which included a magnificent diamond necklace. But he knew nothing definite.

"First," said the old man, "I want you to know that I am going to leave you and Mary Mason my money equally divided. Second: Is there any reason why you can't come here to stay for the few days or weeks I have yet to live?"

To Mac it was a poser. He had promised to help Dan. He couldn't turn down now the man who had taken him out of the streets, cold, hungry and out of work, and launched him again into a world that was warm and good.

He shook his head.

"No, I have to stick to Dan Wheeler."

"Then if you must you must. But I don't care to have Wheeler meet Mary, and I want to warn you not to fall in love with her, for she ought to make a brilliant marriage. I think I have found a man for her. Within a few days I expect a young English nobleman——"

The strain of the interview was telling on the old man. Mac couldn't stay after Mary Mason was announced. From his bed the older McLeod whispered:

"Stop at the bank for your check-book on your way back. *Don't* break with Wheeler. I may have to leave you to protect Mary. Wheeler is dangerous to both men and women, but *don't offend him!* If you ever need advice go to Huen Ling!"

He closed his eyes and looked like a corpse as Mac hurried out to send in the waiting nurse.

When Stuart McLeod left his uncle's house he had fallen even more deeply in love with Mary Mason.

BACK at the hotel Mac told Dan of his visit to Alan McLeod. From Tommy, the bell-hop at the Grand Union Hotel—a lad whom Dan had befriended—Dan learned that there was another plot to make way with Mac.

"It shows us one thing, Mac; your uncle's diamond necklace must be a winner. Other things we must find out for ourselves. Shall we walk into the trap?" asked Dan abruptly.

"Yes—of course," answered Mac without hesitation.

"Well, then; this is a case of clear thinking. We'd better keep together tonight."

A few minutes later they entered "The Chapel," a crowded *rathskeller*.

"This way, McLeod! Come on, Wheeler! Two chairs waiting for you," they were greeted.

They found the table from which came the calls, and there met Nan Preston, Bridget McDevitt and Jane Anderson. Steve Collins was acting as host.

Steve and Dan were not friends. Steve was a boxer of some standing and was being used—so Dan thought—to take the Spark Gang's spite out on him and Mac. Almost immediately there was a bantering over which would be the winner in a bout—Collins or Dan. But Mac heard little of it for he was engrossed in conversation with Bridget McDevitt. A short time later, when Bridget mentioned going home, Mac offered to escort her.

Once started for her house, Bridget told Mac that she was working on the Spark Gang job for the Green Detective Agency, and that they and the Central office had separated Mac and Dan in order to talk alone with Dan.

And it was Bridget who pointed out to Mac his special interest to the Spark Gang.

"I don't see the connection," said Mac. "What are they looking for?"

"I don't know exactly, but you are in danger. Didn't your uncle tell you about——"

"About a necklace? No, he did not."

"There they go now." Bridget clutched his arm. "That was your friend Dan, seeing Nan home. This is the street he'd take after leaving her, but nobody's looking for him. Something's gone wrong—let's hurry!"

When they arrived at her home Bridget stepped inside the hall and flashed on a light. Instantly it was turned off again, and Mac found himself struggling in the dark. A blow from behind stunned him.

He awoke to find that all plans had gone wrong. There was Dan, who had arrived in time to save Mac from being killed, talking to the Chief—Brine himself. During the conversation it developed that Brine knew nothing that Dan did not know. Dan was caustic to the Chief's good night.

When they arrived at the hotel Dan was suffering with acute neuralgia, and they went to Carlson's to engage the services of a masseur. The next morning Mac left Dan at the hotel and went to see his uncle.

IN THE afternoon he reported to Dan.

"The first thing he wanted to know," excitedly began Mac, "was whether I'd been attacked, and then he told me about the necklace. He told me it had been collected stone by stone. All his money is in it; and an attempt has been made to steal it in London, another in Paris and still another in Hamburg. He thinks the Main Guy of the Spark Gang is the same crook who was trying to get it then."

Dan laid his hand on Mac's knee and spoke in a low voice.

"What is the name?"

When Mac managed to think of the name, Jean Bouvais, Dan went white with anger.

"That settles it! Mac, we're going to get this Main Guy. Come on! To Israfil's!"

Within half an hour Israfil was peering into a crystal and advising them that the Main Guy would probably know that Mac did not know the whereabouts of his uncle's necklace. The real reason for their visit was Dan's warning:

"Tonight I may stage a little show to prove that the Main Guy had better lay off Mac. I want to leave no doubt that it is unsafe to play horse with me."

After they left, Mac insisted that Israfil was the Main Guy, but Dan pointed out that Israfil always had a waterproof alibi whenever any "job" was pulled off.

Mac and Dan parted, promising to meet that night at Hawley's, a gambling-club. Mac met Piet Van Twiller and Reggie Willing also on their way to Hawley's.

Over the roulette wheel Steve Collins challenged Dan to a four-round bout that night, and they settled on Carlson's gymnasium as the place. The arrangements made, Dan drew Mac aside.

"I want you to get Israfil to be my second."

"But," said Mac, "what if he refuses?"

"Tell him—and for your life don't repeat this or let any one hear you tell him—that '*No man can make him!*' "

Armed with this cryptic remark, Mac left with Reggie, Piet and Hawley to find Israfil.

They found him in his séance rooms, and after Mac gave the message Israfil agreed to be Dan's second.

The four men left, and impelled by curiosity turned back into the room to find that Israfil had disappeared. They discovered that he had descended into the lower part of the house by a hidden lift in a closet. While they pondered over this bit of hokum, they reached Carlson's, two doors away.

Reggie suddenly came out of his trance.

"Hurry up! I almost forgot; I'm to be Wheeler's other second."

He led the charge up the stairs without another thought of Israfil's stage disappearance.

VII

AROUND the roped square there was room for two rows of chairs, close to the ropes, and behind the chairs was standing-room to spare. All the crowd who had been at Hawley's were already seated, and with them a number of friends they had picked up on the way. In default of any other, Murphy was acting as master of ceremonies.

On their entrance he raised a finger and summoned the trio to one corner of the ring where three chairs were turned down. He explained quietly:

"This is Wheeler's corner, and that is his camp-stool—water—towels. Better take charge of them, Willing, since you are to be one of his seconds—and peel to your shirt. Roll up your sleeves. They'll be ready in fifteen minutes or less. They're dressing down-stairs in the locker-room."

"Where's Israfil?" Reggie asked as he shed his coat. "He said he'd come."

"Down-stairs; he brought some things five minutes ago. Everything is going fine. Don't look so down in the mouth; your man isn't going to get killed!"

And with that the handsome pugilist—perhaps the most handsome man who ever held a championship—left them to respond to eager summons from some sporting young aristocrats who wanted him to decide upon the terms of certain bets.

"Say, feller—" Reggie slapped Mac on the back with sudden elation—"that was a lot for Gentleman Jack to say! I feel better; I'm goin' to bet every cent I got on Wheeler staying three rounds! Maybe four if I can get odds enough. And you better do it too. You, Piet?"

"Sh-h! Listen!" Piet growled.

A small knot had gathered near by to question and admire Murphy, and just then one young searcher after knowledge had piped up—

"Could Buck Collins lick you if he'd train right, Mr. Murphy?"

The man who was never bested except by the super-fighter Fitzsimmons did not even smile as he answered:

"If he'd train right and fight right he would probably win. He has all the things that go to make a champion, and weight and reach in his favor."

The student was encouraged to go on, while smiles went round the ring:

"I am sorry in a way, for Buck has done such a lot of blowing—rather a bounder, don't you know—but if that's the case I shall have to bet on him to win. He'll just eat this Wheeler up in no time."

"Don't put up money on my say-so," Murphy cautioned the youth gravely. "There are all kinds of possibilities in this game, and no man is out until the count of 'ten.' Besides, 'this Wheeler' is no easy mark for any man."

"Then you think he has a good chance to last four rounds?" anxiously queried another of the amateur sports who had been betting heavily and offering odds on Collins.

He had not heard the talk at Hawley's, and he whispered as he asked:

"You know this man Wheeler? Has he got something up his sleeve?"

"I knew him years ago."

Murphy moved away as he said aloud but quietly—

"But he has not told me his plans."

"But would you bet on him to—" the youth was persisting when Murphy interrupted evenly:

"I shouldn't bet. I am to be both referee and time-keeper. Here are the men now!"

And he moved to the center of the ring.

Everything had been made ready as if for a championship bout. The floor was covered with resined sail-cloth inside the padded ropes. In each man's corner were his camp-chair, water-pail, sponge and towels. Even the usual lemon was ready and waiting when the two principals climbed through the ropes.

Both wore bath-robes, hanging open and showing that they were stripped to trunks and "sneakers" or low, rubber-bottomed tennis shoes.

There was the customary burst of applause at their entrance, but they walked directly to their corners without making any acknowledgment of their reception.

They sat down, and during the brief interval of waiting for Murphy's announcement all eyes were on them. The hum of talking and laying bets died out, and the air was tense with the strain of anticipation; but the two boxers seemed perfectly at ease. Each one turned to talk coolly with his seconds. Collins had in his corner an ex-pugilist who was his valet and rubber at all his semi-public appearances. With Wheeler was Israfil, bearded but looking young and athletic in shirt-sleeves and rubber-bottoms. He was known to be a wrestler of ability and an all-round athlete, as well as a "sport," by many of the spectators. He was greeted by several calls of "Hey, professor—good boy!" etc., and he smiled his flashing, white-toothed smile as he waved a towel in response.

Wheeler meanwhile spoke in a low murmur to Mac and Piet as he leaned over the chair in his corner.

"Wait! Don't bet until I do," with a side look at their neighbors which precluded any questions or discussion on their part he turned away to examine the gloves, after the custom followed in all such contests.

While the seconds were tying on the gloves the referee made his brief announcement:

"This bout is to be by Queensbury rules. Four three-minute rounds with a minute between. If Wheeler is on his feet at the end of the fourth round he wins."

Before putting on the gloves both men had thrown off their robes, and in the short wait that followed the announcement the seconds finished tying the wrist-strings. Meanwhile the men stood stripped to trunks and shoes—all eyes on them and sizing them up.

Collins looked the born fighter he was—heavy in chest, shoulders and upper arm, the muscles that give hitting-power; lean below the waist; a head that sloped upward from a rather thick neck. He had a face that was famous for its regular beauty, in spite of a sensuous, insolent mouth now curled in a smile of contemptuous relish as he glanced across at his opponent.

Wheeler looked outclassed entirely, to a careless observer. Smaller, and almost effeminate in his graceful outlines, not a muscle stood out above the smooth, rounded limbs. Even his wrists and ankles tapered gracefully, concealing their steely strength. It was only on movement that the muscles under the satiny skin rippled with a quickness that almost escaped the eye.

Probably only Murphy and Israfil noted that Dan's striking-muscles almost equaled Collins' in girth, their balance hiding their size, and that his easy lightness in motion indicated nerve-force at the *n*th power. Israfil finished tying the gloves on him and as he stood back Murphy, near the center of the ring, called sharply:

"Ready? *Time!*"

To Mac, with his eyes fixed on his friend, it seemed as if Dan had got to the middle of the ring without use of legs, so swift and lightly smooth were his movements. His glove touched that of Buck Collins, and the two circled alertly, eye to eye and feinting for an opening. The dance had begun—the dance that through the ages has been the test and the expression of manhood.

The breathless silence of the onlookers was broken by a sigh of relief and eager anticipation, interrupted by excited whispers, while not one eye left the two graceful figures in the center of the ring.

Collins went after his man with a rush, feinted a lead with his left and swung a whirlwind right for the jaw. It swished only air, and Buck, who caught himself to whirl round, found Wheeler behind and facing him, cool and scornful. Somebody at the ring-side let out an explosive, "Ha!"—quick and repressed.

Buck was after his man instantly, leading with swift straight jabs, short but deadly—stabbing blows that did not seem to land. Dan held out his left glove, palm flat and tip resting on Collins' chest near the armpit. Thus extended, Dan's reach equaled Collins' or bettered it a bit, and so he gently held Collins off.

Light as thistledown, he moved with each movement of Collins and kept just out of his reach as measured by that outstretched glove—always in motion in accurate response. Always Wheeler circled a bit to the right, keeping away from Buck's fatal right swing. To the audience it was perplexing—to Buck Collins it was tantalizing.

"Fight, you four-flusher!" gritted Buck.

Wheeler's cold silence roused the wrath of the amateur champion, while the delicate touch of the glove-tip on his chest, holding him off easily, maddened him.

Suddenly Buck chopped savagely at the fending arm, using his hand-edge with bone-breaking force—only it hit air. Wheeler as quickly snapped his left arm back and down, while he brought his right up and over in a lightning windmill swing—*boom!* The hard edge of Dan's hand struck Bucks' open chest vertically across the muscles. A slow red wale rose up to show the place, and Buck's next left lead went wild—away to one side.

The swift power of the blow sent a thrill through the crowd. Israfil stuck his head forward to peer keenly, and the referee stepped closer to watch. Collins kept coming with grim persistence and increasing speed. He was bent on finishing his man at once, and was not to be denied—driving, swinging, uppercutting, then chopping fiercely at that annoying arm. Each time he chopped he got that same paralyzing edgewise blow, booming resonantly on his chest-muscles, making his next lead fly wide; and each time the red mark on his chest grew darker.

All the time the pace grew faster as Collins came on more fiercely; and all the time Wheeler kept out of reach or sidestepped and eluded him. It was a finished show of skill and grace that surprized the delighted onlookers. The round finished at the call of "Time!" by the referee, with not one stiff blow landed by either man. Collins went to his corner scowling and growled an order to his man, who at once began kneading the chest-muscles where the red wale showed dark and swollen.

IN THE one-minute rest excited whispering broke out—now and then a louder comment rose above, the hum and buzz:

"He's an artist—he's going to do it! Jujutsu! That won't save him when Buck lands on him— But he can't get to him! It's foul— No, it isn't! Both chopped anyway! Bet you he gets him next round!"

Meanwhile the two men lay back with arms out along the ropes while the seconds kneaded their muscles rapidly. Collins was flushed and winded, but only a faint glow showed in Wheeler's lean face, and he breathed deeply—easily. At the call of "Time!" the noise abruptly stopped; the seconds crawled through the ropes and took the camp-chairs after them. The second round started like the first, but more so. Collins began by a series of vicious chops at that extended left arm—bound to put it out of business and to bore in; but the more he chopped the more benumbing thwacks landed on that precise swollen ridge across his chest-muscles. It began to pain him with a numb-sore ache. He looked more anxious as he realized that he was losing his punch with that arm—his drives and swings lacked steam, flew grotesquely wide—and he slashed and bored in still more wildly.

As it became more plain that Wheeler was avoiding punishment almost entirely, showing supreme skill in defense and footwork, the tension at the ring-side rose steadily with the surprize. Few besides Murphy knew that Dan had been a finished boxer before he had got his growth—had absorbed it almost with his mother's milk—and that it was as easy to him as his quiet breathing.

He slid about the ring with the easy swiftness of a shadow, relaxed and graceful but with the glitter of a cold flame in his tiger-eyes. He seemed only to be slowly warming to his work and getting interested, while

Collins was already in a sweat and breathing hard and loudly. Still Dan held his fire, and landed those accurate, slicing blows on Buck's striking-muscles with deadly nicety.

Already even money was being offered on Wheeler to last the four rounds, and no takers. The few blows that Collins landed in this round were almost flukes, and seemed to take no effect. Toward the end of the round it was noticed that Murphy was watching those strange blows of Wheeler's, and frowning in disapproval as if his conscience troubled him.

"Time!" he called at length, and immediately added as the men went to their corners:

"Gentlemen! This chopping with the unpadded edge of the hand has got to stop. It may not be a foul, and both men have used it, but it is not boxing. From now on I rule it out."

Collins smiled a sneering, out-of-breath smile as his chest worked like a bellows. Meanwhile he worked the padding off his knuckles, rubbing his right glove on the rope behind him. Wheeler showed no change of expression, but at the call of "Time!" he folded his fists as he got to his feet and shook his shoulders as he lowered them to a half-crouch. He looked ready for a cat-like leap as he met Collins at the center of the ring.

A shiver of instinctive anticipation went round the room as the crowd took in the situation. It looked as if this was to be the show-down.

At this moment of tension Wheeler showed his unnatural poise and consciousness of dramatic effect by a characteristic move that looks slight in print, but was startling in actual effect on these who noted it. Even as Collins launched at his head the first vicious drive Dan threw over his shoulder, sidestepping lightly as he spoke, the careless words—

"You forgot the chair, professor!"

In his strained interest Israfil had forgotten to take the chair outside the ropes. Even the dignified referee smiled his appreciation and shook his head. There was little more smiling during that memorable third round.

Collins set the pace with a savage burst of speed, a bitter malignity that surprized even his admirers. He hurled himself at his man to annihilate him. He was in a white-hot, homicidal rage now, frantic at the escape of this man who had the presumption to stand up to him unhurt for two whole rounds; and he let himself go in one of his berserk fits that had earned for him the name of "the Amateur Assassin."

He flashed his blows from all directions with the fury of a maniac and a swiftness incredible; launched himself upon Wheeler like an insane thunderbolt; he swung, drove, smashed and swung again in bewildering alternation and seemed to gain power and speed as he came on. No man could escape or stop him.

He hurled his heavier body upon his opponent with all his weight and strength. He roughed in the clinches with elbows—head—shoulders. He banged, battered, wrenched and twisted, butted and bruised, flung himself bodily again and again upon Wheeler, clinched and hung upon him while he lifted heaving uppercuts into Dan's face and stomach. He bore down all his weight upon his shoulders and chopped foul blows over the kidneys while their bodies hid the deed from the referee—swung ripping backstrokes with his elbows as he broke away.

All this roused the primitive savagery in the men about the ringside, who were swept from surprize and disgust back to a primeval blood-lust—a sort of fierce intoxication—by the very beastliness of the sight. The referee warned in vain until a low word from Wheeler out of the dog-fight flurry came, clear and sharp—

"Keep out, Jack—*my man!*"

Murphy alone heard it, and waited.

Wheeler alone never lost his cold, hard poise. No man could avoid punishment like that, but he steadily blocked and sideslipped some of it, slipping out of clinches, parrying and ducking, yielding when he must and countering when he could—all with a nice economy of effort and a saving of strength. At each opening and break-away, however, Dan whipped in his sharp blows—so quick that they went almost unnoticed—always at the hitting-muscles of Buck's chest or over the heart, where a spot of angry red grew steadily darker.

But no man or woman born could stand that strain without showing some effect. While Collins' arm's-length blows had lost their first force and accuracy, due to Dan's shrewd, paralyzing blows on the directing-muscles, he kept up and even increased the ferocity of his dirty work and infighting.

Wheeler was giving way more readily—showing signs of fatigue and distress.

Collins saw his chance to finish him then and there. He flung himself upon his weakening opponent with a final outburst of ferocity, using all he knew of unfair fighting. He threw all his weight and muscle into one final smashing attack; he battered, tore and wrenched Dan's arms, neck and body, ground and twisted as he clinched and hung on, lifted heavy jabs into his stomach, chopped heavy foul blows over the kidneys and banged with head and elbows at the face. There arose a shout of protest, and Murphy sprang forward to force the men apart; but over Collins' working shoulders Dan shook his head, pale and grimly fierce. The referee hesitated an instant.

And at that very critical moment Collins heaved a lifting uppercut into Dan's relaxed body—just to the right of the pit of the stomach. It was the horrible blow known as the "corkscrew" to a certain lightweight champion who had invented and used it to win many a fight—a blow that emasculates a man, makes him weak and sick with agony, nobody knows just why or how. The referee actually groaned aloud as he saw the twisting blow drive home with a snapping thump, plainly heard above the confusion.

Wheeler hooked his chin over Collins' shoulder and hung on weakly. For one second his face, white and rigid with eyes rolled up, appeared fixed above Buck's wrenching shoulder. Then Dan's head rolled aside; he slipped to his knees and crumpled forward to the canvas.

He was not quite unconscious, for he raised his shoulders—got on his hands and knees. There he stopped, swaying, breath coming only in weak gasps, while Collins stood crouched and panting over him, ready to finish him the instant he should rise to his feet.

"Stand back!"

Murphy shoved Buck aside and counted—

"One—two—three—four—five!"

Dan drew up one knee and planted one foot flat on the canvas.

"Six—seven!"

Dan swayed and almost toppled sidewise from his hands and knee.

"Eight—nine——"

Wheeler heaved his body up and backward and got both feet under him just as Collins launched his lethal right swing exactly at the point of the jaw. Dan's forward stagger brought him just inside; Buck's fist passed behind his neck, but even so the impact of Buck's forearm all but knocked Dan out as he toppled forward into another clinch. Before the breakaway came the saving word—

"Time!" in the midst of a roar of shouts and disputes at the ringside.

"Saved by the bell!"

It was little Piet who said it, and it was Piet who was inside the ropes with Reggie to help Dan to his corner. The excited talk continued around the ring, and more bets were made as soon as it was seen that Wheeler could keep his legs under him on his way to his chair.

"Ten to one Buck gets him this round!" called a red-faced youth who had been the most frenzied shouter during the dirty work.

"Shut your face!" growled a friend disgustedly. "Kick a man when he's down! Wheeler's a stayer, but Buck's too heavy for him. Ought to be stopped!"

Dan was lying back against the ropes while Israfil massaged his body and Reggie sponged his face; and his face was lined with pain. His eyes were closed, and he breathed jerkily, in short gasps.

"Ten to one Buck puts him out this round!" the enthusiast behind Collins repeated in an aggressive shout.

Wheeler's eyes opened and found Piet's face, which was bent over him anxiously. One of Dan's eyes closed in an unmistakable wink. Moreover he nodded decisively.

"I'll take a hundred of that," Piet called across the ring.

The bet was recorded, the enthusiast laughing derisively as he jotted down a memorandum. In the comparative silence that followed, Wheeler was seen to raise his head and stare across the ring with grim intentness, and his voice was hoarse with suffering as he rasped out with gasping pauses—

"What odds—I don't—put Collins out?"

A voice from the grave could not have caused a more startled hush. Then Collins himself answered, while his seconds stopped rubbing him to listen—

"Ten to one."

He stopped to puff, and added—

"You're crazy!"

"I got you!" barked Dan with a hiccuping gasp between. "And I got five hundred—to put up!"

He looked up at Israfil.

"Show 'em, professor."

As Israfil, after a blank look at Wheeler, pulled a roll of bills from his pocket and held it up, Collins managed an out-of-breath laugh of contempt as he admitted—

"All right—my check's good—for five thousand."

And he leaned back on the ropes with a sneering comment directed to his backers but heard all round the ring.

"The poor mutt is knocked dippy!" said he. "But chalk it down."

In Wheeler's corner his second, Israfil the wrestler and expert masseur, was peering into Wheeler's resurrected face with keen suspicion, whispering with a peculiar accent:

"What is? Your abdomen is relaxed all at vonce?"

Wheeler was paying no attention to his second, but was watching Collins and listening to Collins' acceptance of the bet. When he saw Buck's backer recording the terms he looked up at Israfil with almost his natural, clear-eyed aggressiveness.

"Then *that's* all right!" said Dan quietly.

He drew a long, deep breath with only one catch in the middle as he sat up straight in his camp-chair; then in a lower tone he added:

"Never mind the body muscles, professor. Give my arms a few twists. Now a suck of that lemon. All set! Gimme room!"

At that moment came the call of "Time!" and Wheeler was on his feet!

At the first quiet words addressed to Israfil, that gentleman had stood up with a jerk as if slapped in the face, only to bend over again as quickly for a brisk massage of Wheeler's upper arms, then to duck through the ropes with the camp-chair as Dan rose firmly to his feet—just before the call of time. Mac heard Israfil's explosive whispered comment, "*Kolos-sal!*" addressed to the world at large, as he took his place close at hand; but Mac was staring with incredulous delight at the change in his friend.

WHEELER came to the center of the ring with almost his usual effortless glide. The lines of distress had left his face, and his long green eyes glittered with a dancing light as he said distinctly to Collins—

"Your face is too pretty, Collins—watch out for that *beak!*"

Collins, sure that Wheeler's front was all bluff, had launched a knockout swing as Wheeler spoke. The taunt angered him afresh, and he struck with fierce abandon. Dan ducked under the blow, drove a swift straight counter at Buck's nose as he spoke his final word, "*beak!*" and the blow landed—

Chack!

It was a nasty, moist-sounding smash that landed fair on Buck's classic Grecian beak—delivered easily and smoothly, but with Wheeler's abnormal nerve-force behind it; and it set Collins' head back on his neck.

Buck staggered from the jolt and shook his head to clear his eyes of springing tears, and a thin, dark stream crept from each nostril over lips and chin. He had not recovered his balance nor got his eyes clear when he led again with random rage; and again came the savage counter—

Chack!

The sound was louder and more wet. The blood from Buck's nose spattered his arms and chest—almost spurted from his flattened nostrils and dripped from his chin. Buck gave his head one flirt and tore in with wild blow after wild blow. His vision was blurred and dim; he smashed and flailed with an insane fury—and not one blow landed.

His chest muscles were bruised and weakened by Dan's hammering, and his eyes were filled with welling tears—almost blinded. He was striking in the dark. Wheeler stepped around him daintily, an icy gleam in the long green eyes that never left Buck's face, and put in his drives with neat precision.

"*Chack!*"

Dan sidestepped a wild punch—waited for right distance—

"*Chack!*" dancing lightly out of reach—then stepping in—

"*Chack!*"

Blocking a random blow on the instant, never swerving eye or fist from the bloody mark before him, Wheeler snapped each blow to the same spot with the speed of light and with weird effect. What had been Buck's proudest feature, his straight Greek nose, was no longer a "beak" but a mushroom effect of dull crimson hue. The same dark pigment streaked his body to the waist.

And still the slaughter went on, and on.

With haunting regularity came the wet, spattering sound of soggy glove on flattened nose—

"Chack!"

A moment of soft shuffling footwork, then again—

"Chack!"

And always with the same nice accuracy and governed force—hard enough to keep Collins dazed and groggy but not to send him to the floor. Buck's eyes were closing now; his lower face was a raw-steak color, and even his legs showed narrow straggling lines of red; he reeled and staggered all about and around while he flailed with steady fury. He was a sickening sight; and, althought all the spectators knew he was not damaged seriously, it was a thing to turn one's stomach.

With a monstrous cruelty Wheeler kept at the slaughter. His cold, contemptuous face, hardly marred by bump or discoloration, never altered in line or expression as he snapped his left with sweet precision to the exact spot.

Instead of letting up he began to use both hands at last—left-right—left-right—in a double drive that sounded a double-time beat—*"Chack-chack—chack-chack,"* still wet and sick-sounding. With each two-time beat Buck's head jerked backward in a grotesque reversed nodding quite horrible to witness.

The audience, open-mouthed with growing disgust, looked on in a silence that finally became uneasy, interrupted by low gusts of incoherent noises—shuffling of feet—a low hissing. Then even this stopped, and there followed a hush of incredulous horror—this thing was an impossible nightmare— It *must stop!* But it did not; it went on and on, until "Oh-h-h—*Oh-h!* For God's *sake!*" burst out all round the ring.

It was a big breathy groan from a dozen lungs, full of horrified revolt and desperate appeal. Several men rose from the chairs near the ropes—were clapped into their chairs again by hands behind them.

At that moment Wheeler had stepped back and aside—let the flat-faced apparition flounder past him. He repeated the performance, watching with his head tilted critically. In the abrupt hush that had fallen after the general outburst, Dan said grimly—

" 'S enough!"

And as Collins turned toward him his repellent face. Dan slightly bent his knees straightened them, and therewith lifted a whistling uppercut to the point of the chin. He turned away without a backward look and went to his corner.

With the landing of the blow Collins seemed to stretch his neck and look upward. His feet left the floor; he turned gently backward in the air, then landed with a crumpling thrash on the canvased floor.

Collins lay outstretched on his back, arms out in the form of a cross. Murphy did not take the trouble to count, but called for water.

"Well, professor?" Dan was saying to Israfil, standing erect in his corner and looking at his second with what looked like grim menace in his cold face.

Although he was breathing deep and regularly, the lines around his mouth showed pain as well as the grisly effort that had overcome it. And Israfil was staring dumbly, his eyes wide and dilated. From him Dan turned to Mac:

"What's matter? Sick again, Mac? Somebody might open a window; it's close in here."

Then he turned back to Israfil with a jerk of his head toward the fallen man:

"Better see what you can do with that nose, professor. Now is the time, while he is hearing the birds singing."

Israfil obeyed, but it was evident that he was thinking of something else—still dazed and absent-minded. He did some emergency work on the nose, and a surgeon was summoned at once. For all he could do, however, and in spite of the best efforts of surgeons then and later, Buck's features never again had their original regularity. His nose was always a bit out of drawing and a bit off-color after that night.

There were other effects. Collins was no squealer, and he was not the man to harbor small spite, for all his failings. When he was washed and dressed, plastered and fixed up, he came forward to shake hands with Wheeler. His eyes had not closed entirely, thanks to plentiful hot water, and he managed a battered smile as he came forward, followed by a knot of his admirers, to where Wheeler stood with Mac, Piet and Reggie. Collins held out his hand.

"That was a clean licking, Wheeler; there's no dodging that, and I admit it. You are the most dangerous man I ever faced. I want to apologize for losing my temper and fouling you—I deserved more than I got—and for my friends who did some tall shouting. They aren't used to the sight of blood, and they thought I was being murdered."

"That's all right."

Dan took the hand and for the first time flashed one of his quick little half-smiles.

"We both strained the rules some, and you almost got me by that liver-ripper—it was a dandy!"

At that moment Israfil passed the group, on his way to the door and his rooms, and Wheeler caught his light-gray eyes.

"Well, professor, I understand you never were in a ring—never saw a finish-fight with the gloves before. Do you still think it is child's play?"

The Mysterious Israfil seemed almost to try to dodge and escape, but Dan's gaze seemed to hold him. He stared stupidly at Wheeler alone as he muttered:

"It is brutal—fierce. I did not understand."

"No. There are several things you didn't understand."

Wheeler now spoke with a grim emphasis.

"That's one reason I wanted you in the ring—to learn *certain things*. Don't forget 'em! Good night!"

"I will not forget. Good night!"

Israfil left without a word to any of the others, and Collins grinned behind his departing back:

"What have you done to the Great Israfil, Dan? He looks as if he had got the licking himself."

"I just wanted to show him something," said Wheeler carelessly as he turned to go with his three friends, and at the door he waved—

"Good-by, everybody!"

On the sidewalk he turned to McLeod with the remark:

"That job wasn't so raw. What did Israfil say when you asked him?"

Mac hastened to tell about the interview and the peculiar disappearance by way of the sliding closet in the rear room. Wheeler nodded with satisfaction.

"I knew that was a trick room, but I don't see why he gave it away like that—unless he lost his nerve and forgot to lock the door. It looks that way."

"I didn't see Carlson or his assistant with the tattooed hand," Mac reflected. "And Israfil acted as if he owned the place, Carlson and all."

"He owns the place, I hear," said Piet, who overheard the last, "and rents to Carlson. But he doesn't like to have it known. Say, Wheeler, how do you get into such fine condition? You were fit to fight for the belt tonight."

"I don't mix any water with my whisky. Ask Mac."

And Dan fell silent, never speaking another word on the way up-town except to say good night to Piet and Reggie when they parted.

WHEN they were alone in their room at the hotel Mac asked the question that had been in his mind all the time since the bout—

"Wheeler, what did you do it for?"

"Cash was getting low—lost on the wheel," Dan promptly answered. "I got to use hot water on that eye, or I shall have a mouse over it."

He inspected his face in the mirror carefully.

"But you said you were going to show Israfil something. Wasn't that the real reason?" Mac persisted.

"Israfil, and others," assented Dan.

"And you did it with a view to scaring the mysterious crook who is doing these Spark Gang jobs."

"What's the use picking it to pieces?"

Wheeler started for the bath-room and stopped at the door to say the final word:

"I don't think they'll try any more frisky frame-ups on either of us. That's one thing. Another—" lowering his voice—"you can set it down that both Israfil and Carlson know more about the Spark Gang robberies than they have ever told. They are mixed up in it, whether they know it or not. That sticks right out, and that is all I can tell you now.

"I am going round to Carlson's tomorrow morning to get the stiffness rubbed out of me, and I may learn something—and I may not. You go see your uncle and ask him for a show-down—ask him where he has hidden that necklace."

Before Mac could protest Wheeler was in the bathroom and the hot water was rushing in the bowl.

McLeod's feeling for his room-mate was changing every day, and he looked upon him now as something between a wizard and a man-eater. There seemed to be no limit to what Wheeler could do in the way of fighting and man-handling. He admired him for that, but there were still times when Mac was sickened and repelled by the inhuman cruelty of the man. The sight of Collins, reeling about the ring with a flattened, bloody pulp where his nose belonged, kept coming back before Mac's eyes and made him shrink from Wheeler in horror.

And yet, for all his cold cruelty, Wheeler had an attraction that was more powerful every day. He was always interesting—always doing the unexpected; and his attitude toward Mac was always delicately respectful even when his words were most brusk and dominating.

Then McLeod could not forget his tact and kindness to him when he had found him, starving and desperate. For this he was deeply grateful, and he reproached himself for the thought that Wheeler might have known who he was—might have picked him up "as an investment," as his uncle had worded it. He was still brooding on these matters when Wheeler came out of the bathroom and gave him a keen, quizzical look.

"Still at it? What's the use?"

And as he rubbed his face with some sort of ointment that he had in a jar he went on comfortably:

"You will think yourself into a muddle. It doesn't pay to overthink yourself. Keep doing things, keep your eyes open, and your thinking will do itself. If you know what to do next, that's enough."

Seeing that Dan was in an expansive mood, Mac ventured a few direct questions.

"Did you come to New York to hunt the Spark Gang?"

"No—to look around and see what I could do. Then they got after me on all sides to look into this Spark Gang business—offered a reward if I'd turn the trick; but I can get money when I want it."

Wheeler spoke carelessly.

"What decided you to follow it up?" Mac persisted.

Dan turned to look at his companion as if to see whether he were serious.

"Whoever is behind this business—call him the Main Guy for now—has forced it on me. He's asking for trouble—jumping on you when he knew you were a friend of mine—and now he's going to get it," was Dan's simple explanation.

"And you never saw me until three days ago!" Mac exclaimed.

"Besides, your uncle was a friend of the best friend I ever had," Dan continued, "to say nothing of the fact that the job is mine; I've got to do it now whether I like it or not. And that last you don't understand any more than I do—never will perhaps. So quit figuring and go to bed. We have sure started something, and unless my hunch is a flivver you will need all the sleep you can get before this hunt is over."

And Mac followed these directions with absolute trust in their author. Again he was surprized at the confidence he felt in Wheeler, at the way in which he found himself obeying orders without knowing the reason for what he was doing; and again he resolved to make Dan tell him just what he proposed to do. And while he was making the resolve he knew that he would not carry it out. So he slept peacefully.

VIII

DAN was up and gone when McLeod awoke, and he had to hurry to keep his appointment with his uncle at ten o'clock. As he walked up the stately Avenue, a-tingle with health and a perfect May morning, it seemed as if the whole world was his playground. He no longer doubted his uncle's sanity. Wheeler would surely bring things out all right; he had nothing to fear. The only questions that troubled him were whether or not he should see Mary Mason that morning, and whether he was in love with two girls at once.

At the door of the big mansion Chan met him with his unfailing smile and took him at once to his uncle's big bedroom. From his bed the invalid held out an eager hand in welcome, looking stronger than ever; but his first words gave Mac a shock:

"This may be our last talk, Mac, so sit down and listen well—but don't take any notes. It would not be safe to have them in your possession."

"B-But you look better. What—" Mac was protesting when his uncle held up a hand with a smile.

"That's because I stayed in bed. And I have sent them all out of the house except Chan. See if he is on guard in the hall."

When Mac returned from the door to report that the boy was at his post his uncle went on easily:

"Then sit down again, and don't think I am crazy—if you can help it. You did last time; but—what did your friend Wheeler say?"

"He s-s-said you were not."

Mac flushed guiltily to the older man's evident delight.

"B-But you see I didn't know."

"That's just it! It's the fellow who doesn't know that calls the other fellow crazy. It has been the cry of the ignorant since Noah foretold the flood. What did you do last night—you and Wheeler?"

Mac was full of it, and he poured out his story with eagerness. He described the fight by rounds and finished by telling what Dan had said about his motive for making such an exhibition. He finished with a shudder:

"It was horrible to watch, but Collins didn't seem so badly hurt after all. He and Wheeler shook hands. It was this man Israfil that Wheeler seemed to be after—he acted scared, and he talked with a German accent. I thought he was French. What is it? Are you in pain?"

His uncle had suddenly turned white, and his eyes glowed dark and wild for an instant. Then he shook his head with a slow return to normal color.

"Nothing! Just a thought that startled me, but it is impossible. I am all right again. May I trouble you to open that window? Thank you. I shall feel safe in leaving you with this Wheeler. That is why I have not urged you to come to live here—I don't want you to break with Dan Wheeler. Remember that, and stick to him after I am gone.

"Now I am going to talk, and I must make it as short as possible. How far did I get last time?"

"You told me about the necklace, and about the—the man who was after it. And that's about all."

Mac finished with another blush as he thought of his own suspicions of his uncle's soundness of mind.

"Except about the— Why you didn't tell where it is—the necklace, you know."

"Yes, I know. That did sound crazy to you; but I am used to being called a crank and a maniac. You may think I am still crazier before I have finished, but some day you will find I knew what I was talking about. I have neither the time nor the strength to explain everything to you now, for I must tell you a few things to remember."

The older man seemed to be sifting out what was the most important from what he had in mind, and presently asked—

"You understand that I shall leave you very little beside the necklace—and in case that is stolen you will have only a few uncut stones?"

"Yes, but why bother with that?" Mac protested, about to add more objections when his uncle checked him:

"I am not bothering about that. But you must understand why I don't tell you where the necklace is. It is because Mary's fortune depends on it, too, in a measure. If the necklace is stolen, Mary will have only what was left to her. This house and some other property I have mortgaged will make her good for what I borrowed. But if you can save the necklace and sell it—Huen Ling can sell it for you—it will make you both rich. So the secret really belongs to you both. You understand?"

"The secret of its hiding-place? Yes," said Mac. "I can see that. But neither of us would take any advantage of the other."

"Of course you would not, but I don't trust either one of you entirely."

His uncle's smile was indulgent as he went on:

"You might go after it too soon, before the danger of theft is over. So I am going to tell each one of you a part of the secret. When you agree that the time has come to get the necklace from its hiding-place, then put your two parts together and look for the necklace where you think it is. You understand? Then bend over so I can whisper to you."

When he had whispered a few words in his nephew's ear the invalid lay back on his pillows with a look of relief.

"There! Now I am easier in my mind," he said cheerfully. "It may seem like a childish game, and you may think I have deceived you—some day. But you will not be sorry in the end."

"I think I know the place, from what you told me alone," Mac confessed honestly, and again his uncle smiled:

"I see you do, but don't be too sure. You may be disappointed after all. In any case don't forget what you are to do as a last resort—go to Huen Ling."

"I'll remember. Is that all?" asked Mac.

"That is all of that. Now I can reminisce," the older man went on contentedly. "It is wonderful how people weave into and out of one another's lives—appear and vanish at unexpected times. Here is this young man Wheeler, who was once the pupil and protégé of my old friend Jem Slater. I run across him—Wheeler—unconscious and half-dead, in the junk of river-pirates on the other side of the world. I do him some slight service and never hear or see him again until he turns up here in New York to help us out; for it is probable that he has saved your life at least once.

"And most remarkable of all, the man who is behind these attacks on you—the head of the Spark Gang—was one of the men who did Jem Slater to death in Montreal. I am sure of that. Who says there is no guiding intelligence in all this?"

"Wheeler knows, or suspects, that it is his friend's murderer he is after, I think," Mac said thoughtfully. "And Huen Ling urged him to take up the hunt as a duty."

Mac flushed and stammered:

"I f-f-forgot! I wasn't to speak of that—but you won't tell."

"You are a most delightful boy, Mac!" said his uncle. "But don't forget it again. Forget that you ever heard of it, instead! You are dealing with——"

" '—sure death,' Wheeler said," Mac interposed at his uncle paused. "I suppose he meant to impress it upon me—not that he meant it literally."

"Don't be too sure of that."

The invalid sat up in his sudden impressiveness.

"Listen to me," he went on. "I have only a few days to live if the doctors are right, and nothing to fear for myself. Whatever you do, never repeat any talk you may hear about a Nameless Order—an Order That Is Not! Forget that you ever heard of it—ever thought of it — you will do what I ask?"

"Certainly, of course," Mac said in quick alarm for the sick man. "Don't—don't worry about that!"

"But be sure you understand," urged the other anxiously. "I want you to know the danger of a careless word. There is such an order, and its power is unlimited," with a furtive look about the stately room. "I should not dare speak of it if I were not near my end. Do not try to find out any more about it; your curiosity might be fatal—would be fatal. Will you promise?"

"I will," Stuart answered solemnly, seeing that the invalid was under a strain that might be disastrous. "It is nothing to me."

His uncle looked long and silently into his face, and finally closed his eyes in content. Meanwhile Mac was thinking how pitiful it was to see a brilliant mind so shattered, to see a strong man harried by imaginary dangers.

An Order that did not exist, yet was so powerful and dangerous that it must not be mentioned! It had no name, yet its name must not be spoken! Could anything be more wildly insane than such talk?

Very wisely he decided to think no more about it. It made him feel uncertain of his own sanity to try to grasp the idea, so he gave it up. He tried to divert the sick man.

"Do you remember our treasure-hunt in the Sucksand Pond up home?" he asked with a smile. "That was the last time you were in Vermont, and we fished for it by moonlight. We were seen by some boys going bullheading, and they took us for the old colonel's ghost, come back to get his sunken chest of treasure."

"Yes. Our hook was not long enough."

His uncle smiled boyishly.

"But that was not the last time I was in Middle Town o' Stanley. I stopped over there on my way from Montreal to New York only two weeks ago, just before this last heart-attack. Uncle Jed Baldwin looks as young as ever; you will hear from him before long. I gave him your address."

"I am going to have another try for that sunken treasure some day," Mac went on. "I always felt as if there must be some truth in that story. The old colonel was rich, and he didn't dare take all his valuables with him to England."

"Of course there's treasure there," said the sick man impatiently. "The only reason people don't believe it is because it's too good to be true; they are afraid to believe it. You will get it some day. Wait until you hear from Uncle Jed Baldwin.

"But you are impatient to be off with Mary, so don't stay to make talk with a sick man; it's time for the nurse to be back anyhow. Good-by—perhaps for the last time. I am tired. Call Chan."

"I shall see you tomorrow at the usual time."

The young man tried to speak confidently as he took the thin hand in his own for a warm clasp, but the look in his uncle's big hazel eyes haunted him for the rest of the day. When he looked back from the door before summoning Chan, the face on the pillow seemed waxy-white and still. He tiptoed out as if from a chamber of death.

BUT the afternoon in the sunlight with Mary Mason carried away his depression, and he returned to the hotel in the evening in high spirits. He felt that he was making progress. Mary listened to him, looked at him, as if—well, as if she liked to do it.

He felt sure that the only thing that stood in his way was her money. If the wonderful necklace of his uncle's really existed, and if he ever realized on the sale of it, he would dare to ask her the all-important question. Two large Ifs, those, but he was hopeful.

He ran up the stairs to the room where Wheeler was walking the floor and waiting for him.

Dan gave him one look and snorted:

"Hm! Read the evening papers?"

"No. I heard boys shouting something—something about diamond-robberies; but I—I was——"

"E-ah! You are yet!" Dan interposed dryly. "Listen! You are in New York. Diamonds have been stolen, and today the thief wrote a confession and turned on the gas—just before the plain-clothes men got to the place to arrest him. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Wh-Wh-Who wa-wa-was it? And who found him?" stammered Mac.

"Carlson, the masseur," said Dan. "And it was Israfil who got on to him—he and McGuire. More than that, Carlson's confession said he was the Main Guy of the Spark Gang robberies—said he worked his men by hypnotism as Israfil claimed all along, and got rid of them afterward. I told you this Israfil was a wise bird, and he has bought Carlson's sanitarium—bought it a few days ago."

"Then Israfil will get the big reward," said Mac. "And that——"

"Not yet; they haven't found the diamonds," Wheeler said impressively, "nor their trick paper that has stirred up such a row in Washington. They are still searching the sanitarium, but I'm betting they won't find it there. It all looks phony to me. More to it, son—more to it!"

"My uncle ought to know about this!" said Mac explosively. "He has been afraid of this man all along—and now he can sell the necklace, and——"

"Did he tell you where it was?" Wheeler interrupted.

"N-No—not all of it. He said that a——"

"All of it! Has he buried it in pieces?" again Dan broke in. "Or are you still up in the clouds? Come down!"

"He told a part of the secret to me and a part to Miss Mason," Mac explained, "so that the consent of both would be needed to find it. He was—is—afraid one of us might find it too soon, before the big thief is landed, and have it stolen from us after all. But now he can tell himself. If Carlson was the man—and he is dead—there's nothing to prevent his selling the necklace himself. He ought to be told."

And Mac fidgeted with excitement.

"He's been told before now; don't worry," said Dan. "Did he tell you where he kept his loose stones?"

"Yes, he— No! I beg your pardon—I wasn't listening. I was——"

"I see you were—are still. Listen here! Does it make any difference to you whether you take a wedding-trip to Europe or peddle shoestrings on Fourteenth Street?" Dan asked with the calm of exasperation. "If not, how about the girl? Want to see her behind a counter, or wearing tights in the front row of the chorus?"

"Look here! That will be all of that!"

Mac got white around the mouth.

"She doesn't come into this at all."

Wheeler curled his thin lips.

"No?" he retorted. "Suppose that house is robbed and burned—what would she have then? And I am trying to get it into your skull that this thing is not over yet. The Main Guy is still to get! What's more, I figure that he is about ready to pull off his biggest stunt, and this Carlson affair is just a curtain-raiser. How much cash have you got in your clothes?" he finished crisply.

"By George! I never thought of that!"

Mac stared at the wall vacantly.

"She wouldn't have much if everything in the house— But then, she has some bonds. Mr. Van Sanvoord was talking about them today—so she'd be all right."

Dan waggled a hand hopelessly.

"Not a trace of reason left! I have got to have a helper in his right mind. Right now is a good time for a safe-cracking job—the police busy down-town and throwing themselves bouquets over this Carlson business; you'll read about a crop of burglaries in the morning papers. Has your uncle got a wall-safe in his house?"

"Yes. Nobody else knows how to open it but Miss Mason," Mac's face was fondly admiring at the thought. "They call it the Sucksand Pond when anybody else is around."

Wheeler had turned away in disgust, but he whipped round at the last.

"What's that? What's a Sucksand Pond?"

"A pond up in Vermont on the old McLeod place," Mac explained. "It has a quicksand bottom. Back in Revolutionary days old Colonel McLeod—my great-great-grandfather—was a rich old Tory; and when it got too hot for him he skipped in the night for England, and the story goes that he sunk a treasure-chest in the quicksand. Nobody ever has found it yet. My uncle and I fished for it once, but the Sucksand is ten or twelve feet deep."

"Hm! Sounds pretty thin, like most buried-treasure stories," Dan said scornfully. "Too easy to get it with a long hook. And why did he do it?"

"Hoped to fish it up after the 'Rebellion' was put down," Mac said heatedly. "And you try it once! Just stick an oar down and you'll swamp the boat trying to pull it out. Old Zeb Chellis almost drowned one night, fishing for it on the sly. And another time——"

"All right; I'll try it some day," Dan promised with sarcasm. "It's a wonder your uncle didn't sink the necklace up there, if it's so safe."

"That's just what I think he did!"

Mac leaned forward in his chair and whispered excitedly:

"I'd just as soon tell you what he told me. It was, '*Drag the bottom of Sucksand Pond!*' What else could he mean?"

"The wall-safe might have a false bottom," Dan mused. "But he wouldn't be apt to say, 'Drag.' Don't talk about it to anybody else. Hark!"

He jumped up to run into the hall, then looked out of Mac's bedroom window before he came back, grumbling:

"That fire-escape is too handy—and I don't like the look of things generally. It is too smooth on the surface, this Carlson business—too easy. Then they didn't find the sparks. I have a good mind to go into partnership with this man Israfil on this thief-hunt—he's got brains."

And Dan paced the floor with smooth, cat-like strides. Once he stopped to look at his room-mate and say thoughtfully:

"And this Main Guy is a fast worker when he's started. He won't wait for us. Tonight is his time, and he knows it. There's a fire—right now! Listen! Uptown, too!"

And he stood tensely alert, head forward and long green eyes glittering. It struck Mac that Wheeler looked like a young magician peering into the unknown—seeing things distant and invisible to common eyes. It was one of the moments when Dan made him feel creepy.

But Wheeler brought him back to practical matters with a jolt.

"Got any cash in your clothes?" he asked sharply.

"No—only some small change. Why?"

"Here is the fifty I borrowed. Get uptown as soon as you can—watch your uncle's house! If there is nothing doing, keep out of sight. And if there is a fire or explosion near by—*don't go to it!* Stay right on the job watching the house—and go in if you hear a noise."

Mac took the bills Wheeler put in his hand and asked:

"Do you look for an attempt to rob him tonight? Don't you believe that Carlson was the real diamond-thief?"

Dan had stepped to the window and stood looking down into the street. The clang and rumble of a fire engine had been coming nearer, and now it roared past, followed by a ladder-truck that careered round the corner on two wheels, with men clinging to its sides and wriggling into their rubber coats. There were other sounds of more distant engines "rolling"—carriages hustled about at a gallop; somewhere a gong within a fire-house sounded its whirring clang.

"More than one fire!" Dan announced abruptly without answering Mac's query. "Get a-going! You ought to be there right now—you'll be late."

And he was off himself, out of the room and down the hall at a noiseless run before McLeod could ask where he was going.

GETTING a carriage at the hotel-door, Mac made good time up the Avenue, but long before he reached his uncle's house he could see he was too late for the fire. It had been at or near that very house, and within a few blocks he met a homing engine. The blaze was a thing of the past, and a small crowd was melting away from the neighborhood of the house, which steamed under a lone stream of water.

An ambulance was drawn up before the door, surrounded by a fringe of the curious and persistent. Stopping the carriage, McLeod ran up just in time to see the disfigured body of Chan brought out, covered by a sheet. The young ambulance surgeon answered his anxious inquiry:

"The Chinese boy. Dead—yes. Never knew what hit him. Just like the other Spark Gang jobs—an explosion down-stairs followed by fire, and a safe cleaned out in the confusion. Looks as if the boy had tried to throw out the infernal machine just as it went off. The old man? Pretty bad, I guess—nurses flying all over the place."

And he turned to a reporter who had just arrived full of breathless questions.

The officer on guard admitted Mac without question when he gave his name, and he splashed his way across the big hall, acrid and darkened with smoke, running with water, as if already it mourned the loss of its owner. Even in this moment of dark foreboding he was conscious of a feeling that he had been through all this before—perhaps in a bad dream.

The door of the library opened, and a red-eyed nurse stopped him.

"In here, Mr. Stuart. We took him here because there was less smoke and noise—and we don't dare try to move him again."

She closed the door to explain in a whisper:

"The doctor hasn't come—but he can't last but a few minutes. We've given all the stimulants, and he's just holding on to see you—you are just in time."

Following her into and across the lofty room, Mac approached the couch by the open windows. The dying man breathed only in spasmodic gasps, straining with out-thrust jaw and corded neck for each painful breath; but his haggard eyes welcomed the younger man, and his lean hand reached for him.

"At last—boy! Bend low—send them—away!" he whispered hoarsely through his blue lips.

Then when the nurses withdrew to the door across the room—

"I waited—to tell you——"

The gasps came more weakly, seemed about to stop forever. Mac raised the fine head and murmured:

"Do you suffer? Can't I do something?"

"No— Nurse—" came the weak whisper, and Mac summoned a nurse with a gesture. She came hurriedly, crushing something in a handkerchief. When she held the handkerchief to the face of the sufferer he inhaled more deeply; faint color came back to the waxy cheeks, and the large eyes opened to dismiss her.

"My boy—don't worry—about money," came the weak, whispered words with gasps between. "Stick to that man—Wheeler. And go to—Huen Ling——"

A few more weak efforts to breathe, growing shorter and farther apart; then a faint—

"Bless you—good-by!"

The lips closed—opened slightly; but no breath came from them for what seemed a long time. Then one long, easy, indrawn breath raised the chest—it fell, and the face lost its look of strained effort.

The great room was filled with a listening hush, broken only by the slow drip of water in a pool by the door.

"He has—gone."

It was the nurse who stood at Mac's side. She pulled the sheet up to cover the peaceful face, and McLeod turned away from the body of his uncle, filled with a great wonder at the simplicity of the last great change.

IX

TWO days after the funeral of his uncle, McLeod was packing up his clothing in the room at the hotel when a key turned in the lock, and Wheeler entered. Mac greeted him with delight:

"Hello! Where have you been? I was just getting ready to clear out."

"Been nosing around," said Dan cheerfully. "Going to hunt a job again, were you? I hear there was nothing left for you after all expenses were paid."

Tossing his hat on the table, he sat down as if for a comfortable chat.

"Not much—less than fifty dollars, I believe," McLeod assented, watching Dan with pleasure.

Somehow Wheeler's very presence banished gloom and made him hopeful.

"The wall safe was cleaned out the night my uncle died, and it seems to have held all the stones he had left, including the great necklace."

"You take it easy— Who says so?" asked Wheeler sharply. "What makes you think the necklace was in it?"

"Miss Mason says so. It was under the false bottom of the main compartment, just as you said. That was what my uncle meant by the 'bottom of the Sucksand Pond.' He had her put it there in its case, but he didn't tell her how valuable it was—if it was so very valuable after all."

Mac was serene and unworried.

"So you begin to think he was not sound in mind—think he imagined a lot of things he told you? What makes you think so?"

Wheeler sat up and eyed his room-mate keenly.

"He said some queer things toward the last—talked about a Nameless Order that mustn't be mentioned, for one thing," Mac smiled.

"So you are mentioning it," observed Dan dryly. "You are too fresh, son. If you listen to me, you will do just what he told you—forget it! What else did he say?"

"Told me to stick to you, not to worry about money, and to go to Huen Ling."

"So you haven't done any of those things."

Wheeler's tone was rather threatening.

"Going to quit me cold? What are you going to do?"

"I didn't know where to find you, and I couldn't stay here," Mac protested. "I didn't think you'd have any use for me; I never was any help to you, and now your job is gone anyway. Thief-catching, I mean."

"*Is* it?" Wheeler said with heavy sarcasm. "I don't agree with the papers, and neither does Israfil."

"He gives me the creeps, that Israfil," said Mac.

"He'll give you a job," Dan retorted. "And if you have sense you will take it. He has offered to hire both of us—you and me; and I have accepted."

"But—you said you could get money any time," Mac reminded him slyly.

"I can. He will pay us both, enough to live on a few days," Dan said coolly.

"Doing what?" Mac hesitated.

"Physical-instructing in the sanitarium—the one he took over from Carlson; and we'd have rooms there. Come on! There's more to this. Follow me, and you will wear diamonds yet—or sell 'em."

And Dan narrowed his eyes invitingly.

"Is that right? It would suit me to a T—but what could I do?"

"Assist me, of course," said Wheeler. "I can teach different kinds of manhandling tricks; you take on the dubs in sparring and exercises. You'd draw some of the young bloods like Piet and Reggie. What's more, son, the Spark Gang robberies were engineered from that building!"

Dan tapped the table and whispered—

"The fun is ahead of us—hear me!"

"I am listening."

Mac began to take fire from Wheeler's strange magnetism.

"You still hope to land the thief and recover the diamonds?"

"Not quite so loud, son! And don't get ahead of the hearse. We are going to stick right at our knitting and see what we shall see. You want to get over your feeling for Israfil. He is going to be our boss, and I get along with him first rate. We are going to tie up with him, then?"

"If you say so—yes."

"We're off!"

Wheeler at once started putting things into a steamer-trunk, whistling as if he had not a care in the world, while Mac went on with his packing in a more hopeful mood. Now and then Dan commented crisply on divers matters:

"Nothing in the papers lately about the McLeod necklace—think there ain't no such animal, perhaps. Some of 'em said there wasn't any Spark Gang either. People got tired of reading about it and forgot by this time—all taken up with this Prince Heinrich. He'll be back from his tour of the States to sail next week. He won't see 'the beautiful Miss Mason' this trip. Where's she gone?"

He stood up as he asked the question, and McLeod did not blush or stammer as he answered—

"Gone up to Middle Town o' Stanley, Vermont, for a rest."

"Hm!"

Wheeler watched for a minute, but Mac still packed deliberately, so Dan ventured—

"Had a row?"

"Sort of. She's got money and I have not—now."

"Yeah! Seen Bridget McDevitt lately?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

And this time Mac did turn round and flush.

"Mother!"

Dan bent over the trunk again.

"How did I know? Miss Preston told me last night—that's how."

"Aha! Oho! Mac exclaimed triumphantly, and the subject dropped while the packing progressed most happily.

McLEOD was not heartless or ungrateful, and he felt pangs of remorse now and then as he realized how hopefully he looked into the future and to further companionship with Wheeler, so soon after the death of his only kinsman. But he would have been either morbid or hypocritical if he had showed deep grief. All the time of his association with his uncle would not have made up a week if put together, so the void in his life was neither deep nor broad when his uncle left him.

Here he was, he reflected, again without a dollar and with no prospects but a doubtful pursuit of a mythical diamond necklace. Yet he was never happier! It must be because of Wheeler. Mac stopped packing his cheap telescope-bag and stood up to look at Dan.

Graceful in every movement, with the unconscious grace of a leopard, perfectly groomed, as coldly sure of himself as ever, Wheeler was laying away a pair of neatly pressed trousers. He became conscious of Mac's eyes on him and faced about. Pushing back his hat, he narrowed his threatening green eyes and remarked doubtfully:

"Yeah. Well?"

"Nothing."

Mac answered the unworded question.

"I was just thinking this was the second time you had picked me up off the streets, for I couldn't live on what Van Sanvoord offered me—I didn't tell you about that."

"I know what a bank clerk gets—about twelve a week," said Dan. "You could live on it if you didn't have to eat every day and wear a clean collar. Well, now you can see this Israfil isn't so bad. He pays twice that for a few hours in the evening. You could hold down both jobs."

"That's a fact!"

Mac brightened suddenly.

"The bank closes at four—I'll try it a few days anyhow."

"Good idea! All packed?" Wheeler said briskly. "Leave that thing here—I'll have both of 'em sent by express. I have got just enough cash left after paying our bill at the desk for a mild celebration. Will we feed it out, or put it on the red at Hawley's?"

"Flip a coin," suggested Mac.

"Got you! Heads—we eat. Heads it is. 'Bout face—drill!"

And Mac followed from the room downstairs, and presently to the street.

"While they are transferring our baggage we will eat," Dan informed him, "and then we will have time to look over our sanitarium all by ourselves. I've got a key, and our friend Tommy the bell-hop has got the job of door-boy—he will be the only soul in the building beside ourselves. Israfil doesn't expect us until tomorrow."

"You still think there's something about the place that the police detectives missed?" asked Mac. "They have searched every inch of the building."

"You never can tell."

Dan was non-committal.

"Don't bother your head about it," he advised.

Thereupon he fell silent and answered questions in single syllables—or not at all—all the way down-town to a quiet restaurant on Union Square. As they waited for their dinner to be served Mac remarked—

"A mighty cheerful celebration."

"Don't talk so much!" Wheeler suddenly flashed out. "I've got one of my spells—I can't think when you're jabbering at me."

And McLeod watched him in silence. Wheeler sat staring straight ahead with eyes that dilated, then contracted, while at times the look on his face was hawk-like and vicious. Already McLeod had learned that out of these spells came some definite plans—plans of uncanny effectiveness; so he did not disturb the menacing quiet, but waited patiently until his strange companion should see fit to take him into his confidence.

Every day Wheeler seemed more incomprehensible to him. A man-killer who was as sensitive as a woman yet could be at times a merciless monster, by turns frankly talkative and savagely silent, it was impossible to sympathize with his varying moods. What does he do it for? Mac wondered. What fun does he get out of life, if he is all the time hunting some man to his death?

And all at once he felt afraid of Wheeler—it came over him like a wave and made him gasp—just as the long green eyes came round to him and realized his presence. He saw Dan's thin lips twitch before he spoke in the low husky drawl he used when he was most difficult to understand—

"Well, what's *your* excuse for living?"

"M-M-My excuse? I— What d'you mean?" stammered Mac.

"You come of New England stock," Wheeler said dryly. "You're not living just for fun. What for, then? What would you do with money if you had it?"

"Oh, I see."

Mac flushed because the question went deep, and spoke with feeling:

"I believe I can write. I have been told so by men who ought to know. I shall try anyway. And if I had money I'd try to use it where it would do some good—the most good—after I had decided where that was. Why did you ask me that question."

"Stick to it then," Wheeler said tersely without answering the last query. "And just for that I guess we'll have to get you your little old sparklers—unless we can make a deal with this Main Guy. He must have a nice little bunch of stones by this time."

Seeing that Wheeler waited for him to say something, McLeod forced a jocular air as he said—

"You'd help the thief get away with his loot if he would divide up with you, of course."

Wheeler narrowed his eyes and took his time before answering:

"Why not? How could I make a better deal?"

But before Mac could speak he got to his feet with sudden energy.

"We better be moving—no time to waste now if we want to look the trap over by ourselves."

And McLeod followed him to the street, never once suspecting that Wheeler spoke in earnest. But as they waited for a downtown car Mac followed up the thought by saying casually:

"Of course you'd be on the run all the time. You couldn't get any satisfaction out of the money you'd make that way."

"That's all rot!" Wheeler said. "There are a hundred places where you'd be perfectly safe if you had money *enough*. Once out of the country they never get 'em. Here's our car."

It was one of the old green horse-cars marked "Christopher St.," and as they sat down on the long empty seat Mac persisted—

"You'd know you were a thief, just the same."

"Ah, now you're talking sense!" Wheeler snapped abruptly. "That's what gets 'em! But this Main Guy we are after is a bad one, the kind that you can't take alive—you remember what I tell you!"

Again his face darkened; and McLeod, knowing the signal, did not speak until the clouds lifted. He could feel that Wheeler sat stiff and tense beside him, and in the air he fancied there was an oppression of coming danger that became ever more heavy and threatening. When Dan finally turned to him with a look of questioning Mac said—

"Well?"

Wheeler shrugged as he answered:

"Just a hunch. There's going to be Proceedings, and we ought to have started sooner. We get off here."

THE night emptiness of the downtown streets seemed more unnatural than ever as they stood on the corner. Dan looked at the building on the corner opposite and said—

"Russian Consulate—four doors from Carlson's."

And he started for the latter place at a pace that made Mac trot to keep up. There was a light in the hall at the sanitarium, and Tommy opened the door to them promptly.

"Gosh! I'm glad it's you, Mr. Wheeler."

The boy's face lighted up as he let them in.

"I don't like to stay here alone, but I'd rather than be with the boss, and he's comin' 'most any time."

"Israfil coming tonight?"

Wheeler turned quickly.

"Then he's changed his mind."

"I guess so. He said you two might be comin' too. Your rooms are all ready, but there ain't anything else ready. Looks darn queer to me."

And as the boy ran on, relieved and comforted by their presence, Wheeler cast a look at McLeod before interrupting—

"Now. You Tommy!"

"Yes, sir!"

"We want to browse around in the office and the massage-room behind it before the boss gets here," Wheeler said slowly. "You get in the bow-window in the reception-room and whistle if the boss shows up. You can see all the way to the corner. Give us time to get up-stairs."

"All right!"

Tommy showed his delight by extra gravity.

"But if he gets in before you can skip, what'll we do then?"

"Then let me do the explaining," said Dan. "I'll take all the blame."

"Shucks! I guess I know you wouldn't let a fellow down," Tommy said proudly. "I tell you! I'll put my key in the lock, and he can't get his in until I take it out."

Tommy's plan was better than his grammar, and he went to his post full of responsibility and importance.

The office was locked, but Wheeler soon opened it with a skeleton-key and led McLeod into the small back room where he turned on the light. The room was small, with bare white walls, and held nothing but the massage-table and a smaller metal stand.

Wheeler stepped across it to a closet at the rear. This he opened and proceeded to take out the shelves with the towels on them, putting them on the table and talking meanwhile:

"Mac, this is the room where the sleuths missed a trick—McGuire, Israfil and the whole bunch. Israfil told them there must be a trick outlet, so they hunted hard—and didn't find it. They didn't find it because it is not here. That is, it is—and it ain't! Tommy's father worked on this job just before he died. It's my hunch that is *why* he died.

"Now what would a masseur be doing with a dumb-waiter? This closet slides down into the laundry and brings up towels and such, and you notice it works different. Squeeze in here!"

With the shelves out there was room for them both, standing close; and, pulling one of the ropes, Dan lowered the lift slowly into the basement, where it stopped.

"Now!"

Wheeler stepped out and scratched a match when they struck bottom.

"I want you to look around and tell me——"

He stopped talking as his eyes, in their swift survey of the basement, came to a dark-lantern standing almost at their feet beside the lift.

"Hi—hi!" Dan said softly as he picked up and lighted the lantern. "What are you doing here? Been used lately, too. This is better yet. Those stairs, Mac, go up to the front hall, and that door into the back yard—all in plain sight—and in front there is a small sub-cellar below this. But where we stand it is supposed to be all solid underneath. See?"

He stamped on the stone floor and threw the light downward from the bull's-eye in his hand.

Then without a word Wheeler pulled the lift-rope until the dumb-waiter was a yard above the floor. Still silent, he stooped to put his hand on the stone slab directly beneath the lift. It was grooved near the edge like its neighbors, but as Wheeler pushed on it it slid smoothly back into a recess beneath the wall—easily, as if on rollers—leaving a hole large enough to admit a man.

Standing up and turning to McLeod, his long green eyes a-glitter, Wheeler said almost in a whisper:

"As easy as that! Mac, we win!"

"D-D-Do you mean we've f-f-f-found where the d-d-diamonds are——"

Mac was shivering with excitement and stammering when Dan touched his arm lightly.

"Ssst! Listen!"

Tommy's running footsteps overhead, and Tommy's hoarse whisper of excitement coming down the lift-shaft:

"He's coming! No time for you to get up-stairs—he'd see you through the door. What'll I *do?* What'll I tell 'im?"

"Tell him we're gone—you don't know where," Dan answered instantly. "And don't keep him waiting! Run!"

Tommy could be heard running. Dan turned to Mac.

"That lets Tommy out, but look where we are! This is where we drop into the bowels of the earth, Mac. Hold the glim!"

And as McLeod threw the ray from the bull's-eye down the square hole, Wheeler lowered himself through without hesitation.

"All right! Something to step on!" he announced with his shoulders still above the floor. "Give me the light and come on—we may as well go the whole route. We are all set for trouble a-plenty any way you fix it, and we may as well have our money's worth. What?"

Mac nodded as he passed the lantern down through the opening and followed after it; and they stood side by side in a small space walled off from the sub-cellar in front. It was littered with broken stone and brick and walled solidly on three sides; but at the back was an opening roughly shored up with boards.

"The Spark Gang's getaway hole!" said Dan. "Now—now! This is where we put it all over Israfil, McGuire & Co. Well, well!"

"Let's keep moving or I'll get cold feet!" Mac urged. "Go on!"

"Good head! I knew you had it in you," said Dan. "Go on it is!"

And with the lantern ahead he crept through the boarded passage. Three yards brought them into a larger passage, at right angles, bricked and damp—nearly circular and almost high enough to stand in.

"An old sewer or water-main or something."

Wheeler threw the light both ways as he announced:

"I'd call a man a liar if I hadn't seen it. What for?"

"D-D-Doesn't parallel the street."

Mac shivered.

"D-Don't believe it ever was used—no pipes nor branches. But what's the difference? Don't stop!"

"My bet is," Wheeler said easily, "that it's somebody's mistake. Somebody fumbled his job and had it hushed up and forgotten. Oh, all right! I'm willing—but which way? Up-hill first?"

To the left the conduit had a slight rise, and Dan led the way for several yards, picking his way to avoid a trickle of water at the bottom.

"Must be almost to the corner—under the consulate about now," he muttered. "And that's all—selah! Filled up, and I don't believe it ever went any farther."

He threw the light ahead to where a heavy wall blocked the passage.

"I say we ramble the other way a spell. How about it?"

"Y-Y-Yes—b-b-but I *know* we are going to run into a s-something—I don't know what. Let's get it over."

Mac's teeth chattered, but more from chill than from fear. As the light swung across his face he grinned, and Wheeler touched him lightly on the back.

"For luck! Don't play scared, Mac, for you can't fool your Uncle Daniel. You take the light and go ahead."

"Can't get lost in a straight hole anyway."

And for a long time Mac led the way in silence. Occasionally they passed a spot where the crumbling walls had been hastily shored up with boards—rather recently because the lumber was new; and always the conduit led downward at a gentle slope. The trickle of water underfoot became a little tinkling stream, and Mac felt his spirits rising as nothing continued to happen.

"I think you were right," he announced. "Some grafting engineer gunned this hole wrong, and they kept the thing quiet. But it must have been years ago, before the streets ran— Yowp! Water! My shoe is full—look at it? And it gets deeper beyond. Now what?"

"That's right. My bet goes as she lays, and this proves it," said Dan. "The poor dub ran his hole under the high-tide mark—or else the island has settled. What's that yonder in the water?"

McLeod sidled along the edge of the tube, braced across with one hand, until he could turn the light down upon the whitish object, then came plunging back, sick and gasping:

"My God! It's a corpse—and the head is— Ah-h!"

Mac was very sick.

"Come out o' that!"

Wheeler pulled him farther up the passage.

"Let's get out of here!" Mac moaned.

"Right you are—and here's the hole. You passed it."

And Dan pulled his mate into another boarded side passage like the one where they had entered. Here McLeod sat down to get over his faintness. A current of comparatively fresh air revived him quickly, and he looked up to ask—

"Who do you suppose that was in there?"

"One of the Main Guy's strikers—one of the gang he got rid of," Dan guessed. "And there may be others. I rise to remark, right here and now, this Main Guy is due to get his! He shouldn't do things like that. Now then! Get up and let's see what's next."

Although his voice was low and even, Mac was startled when he flashed the light across Wheeler's face. It had the intense, venomous hardness that he had seen on it when Dan had said softly, "Matty shouldn't talk so!" and Mac got to his feet with a shudder.

"I thought I heard voices."

He stood listening until he was certain.

Wheeler meanwhile was sweeping the

light around the small earth-walled hole, and then up the rough ladder that led to—what? With a gesture of caution Wheeler started up the rough board steps, and Mac slowly followed.

The voices came more plainly, but at the top they found a dirty cellar. Rotten timbers and a few rotting rags littered it, and there were signs of partial support of the building above—recently done with a few sound scantlings.

Still the voices were above them, and a steep and rickety ladder led to the first floor. The square hole at the top showed a dim light.

"Easy up this ladder!" Wheeler whispered.

And he crept up with the steady stealth of a cat, Mac following as close as he dared with a view to a sudden retreat. Dan had shut off the bull's-eye now, and as he peered above the floor-level he motioned to Mac to come abreast. Together they looked across an empty room into the next, from which the light came.

It was a scene of rot and ruin. The walls were great sores from which the plaster had sloughed off to crumble on the floor. In the middle two men played poker on a barrel-head, sitting on boxes, with a smoky stable-lantern for a light. They had a bottle and tin cup on the floor. A surprizing pile of coins were at the hand of the lean man with the thin Roman nose.

For it was the lean man with the Roman nose who dominated the scene, as well as his companion. He was sleek and dandified in a lumber-camp fashion—as if he had just stepped out of the North Woods of Canada—in his black shirt, red sash and soft moccasins, with a long knife in the sheath at his belt. And his thin cheeks wrinkled in smiles that showed ugly wolf-teeth—smiles that were self-conscious, subtle, sickening in their absurd conceit. He evidently knew that he was fascinatingly handsome—irresistible—as he ogled and bridled with all the airs of a reigning belle.

And his beefy opponent was plainly afraid of him! Although he spoke in gruff monosyllables to the lean man, he watched his every move with stupid apprehension. They spoke in bastard French.

"Isn't he sweet!" whispered Dan. "I have seen that pill before somewhere—Montreal. He's poison-bad. Understand their *patois?*"

"Only a word now and then," Mac answered. "But his voice— I believe he was one of the three kidnapers—that first night."

He gripped Dan's arm.

"Easy there!" Dan muttered. "All we want now is out of here. Watch out!"

For Mac had tried to shift his cramped legs and slipped with a startling crack of the ladder. Both ducked their heads.

The players stopped their talk for a startled moment, but soon resumed their cards without investigating the noise. When Mac peeped again above the floor his eyes, now wonted to the dark, turned toward the right and made out a half-open window.

"Look!" he whispered to Dan. "If we can get past this light-spot we can get through that into a back yard."

"Sure—dead easy. Luck is with us this time."

Dan started as he spoke, and crawled carefully, testing each board before putting his weight on it.

He was out of the track of light, and Mac started to follow his example. In his concentration he had set down the bull's-eye and forgotten it. His first movement knocked it clattering down the stairs.

Before he ducked out of sight he saw the players afoot—the lean one with knife bared and teeth gleaming, creeping toward the door.

"*Hola! M. Bouvais!*" called the hoarse voice of the lean one.

Dan answered—

"*Eh bien—taisez-vous, donc!*"

Wheeler made his voice gruff and unnatural, but the lean Canuck was not deceived. With a foul oath and a word to his companion he sprang through the door, knife held low like a sword, the other close at his heels.

Instantly the dark room was filled with the fight. McLeod scrambled on the narrow stairs to get into it, while around and about him whirled Wheeler and the lean man, waltzing in a desperate hand-to-wrist lock, with the beefy man dodging in and out for a chance to knock Dan in the head with his clubbed revolver.

Mac came into view of the man with the gun, and the latter sprang at him with raised weapon. Mac slipped to his knees.

It was a sweeping blow that the big man aimed, and Mac's head would have been broken if it had not been for Wheeler. Even in his mad dance with the wildcat knifeman Dan kept his wonderful fighting-sense of everything about him. The big man's posterior presented itself as he drove at McLeod, and with the full swing of leg and body Dan let him have it from behind.

The big Canuck overstruck, tripped over Mac and plunged down through the trapdoor to the basement with a slithering crash. There he lay still.

Now that Dan had only one man to take care of, it was soon over. Although the lean man was one of the deceptive, lean-cheeked but heavy-muscled specimens and fought with the fury of a cornered wildcat, he was no match for Wheeler's power and skill. He presently followed his companion, knife and all.

"Come on, boy! This is no place to say your prayers."

Dan snatched Mac from his knees, dragged him to the open window, heaved him through and sprang after him. As they climbed over boxes and back fences Mac grunted in disgust—

"I was about 's much use—as a sore thumb—wasn't I?"

"Oh, I don't know," Dan stopped to drawl. "What was the idea, throwing that lantern down the steps?"

"Just fool in the head—forgot it. But you're bleeding! He stabbed you!"

"Cut my arm a little."

Wheeler whipped off his coat and offered Mac his handkerchief.

"Tie this around it—tight. That's all right. Now let's see where we landed."

Through a hole in a high board fence they came out in an alley, which in turn brought them out on West Street. Wheeler took note of the surroundings.

"That's the dive—in the last one of those vacant old shacks. They'll be tearing them down before long. Brush me off—we got work ahead of us. We go to Huen Ling's first. Let me tell you, Mac, things are going to move from now on! Did you hear the name that Canuck called out—did you?"

"Yes. What do you look at me like that for? It was Boo——"

"Bouvais—Jean Bouvais!"

Wheeler spat out the name with wicked spite.

"The Main Guy is the one man living I'd give my head to lay hands on—the last of the bunch who croaked Slater; but I've never seen him. When I do—*when* I do—Come on!"

And Wheeler set off at a swift, smooth walk, once more coldly silent and repressed, and McLeod had to hurry to keep up. Even when they had got a belated belt-line car, which they had to themselves except for a drunken sailor, Mac could not get another word out of him. He sat in grim silence, a silence even more threatening than the one he had broken on finding the secret outlet from the sanitarium, and he spoke only after reaching the house of the wealthiest merchant in Chinatown.

X

"YOU young men are welcome," said Huen Ling. "I looked for you before. How were you wounded?"

He turned on Wheeler with the question, although Dan had put on his coat over his handkerchief and concealed the cut in the sleeve.

"A man with a knife—only a small cut," said Dan. "It's all right."

"It will be when it is properly cleaned and bandaged," said the Chinaman, clapping his hands for a servant.

He did the bandaging himself, after applying something fragrant to the cut that made it very comfortable, before he would allow any talk of other matters. Then over little bowls of Oolong he gave the signal—

"Now tell me what you have found."

"The getaway hole of the Spark Gang leader," Dan answered. "It's a hole in the ground from Carlson's to West Street. And the name of the Main Guy is Jean Bouvais."

"I have heard of him. He has operated abroad, where he is much feared."

Huen Ling spoke as if talking of the weather.

"But just what did you want me to do—or to tell you?" he asked.

"I want to know what he's hanging around for, if he *is* still in town, now he has got the McLeod necklace," Wheeler said slowly.

"He has not got the McLeod necklace," said Huen Ling calmly. "I could have told you before if you had come to me. The necklace stolen from the wall-safe was paste—an imitation which I procured for Alan McLeod for that very purpose."

McLeod and Wheeler stared at the bland Chinese gentleman, then at each other. It never occurred to them to doubt his word, but it took time to grasp the meaning of what they had heard. There was a silence that could be felt.

"I'd like to know what he looks like, this Bouvais."

Wheeler seemed to make the observation to the room at large. Huen Ling sai—

"I have heard that he has a scar on his chin."

"Israfil wears a black VanDyke," Mac interjected, and Wheeler smiled his quick little grin as he told Huen Ling:

"He sticks to it—" with a tilt of his head toward Mac—"that Israfil is the man himself. And Israfil has got an iron-clad alibi. He was with Captain McGuire when the last three jobs were worked."

Then with sudden seriousness:

"Mac has about lost faith in that necklace. He thinks his uncle imagined it."

"*Was* my uncle perfectly sound in mind?"

Mac let it out half-unconsciously, but with anxious suspense he waited for the wise merchant to answer.

"A hard question to decide," Huen Ling said gravely. "But he did not imagine that necklace. He had diamonds of great value. I should advise you not to lose hope."

"That's what we want to know. Thanks!"

Wheeler jumped up.

"Come, Mac, we're off in a bunch!"

With fervent thanks to his host Mac excused himself and followed Dan to the street. Again Wheeler led him a breathless chase that left no chance for talk on the way back to the sanitarium. It was not until they were going up the steps that Mac panted:

"What are we going to do? Suppose he has found out what we did? I should think——"

"Don't do it!" Dan broke in roughly. "You think too much—that's the trouble with you. It's time to get action and keep moving; but wait until we are alone upstairs. I'll give you something to think about."

His face was grim and hard as he pushed the bell-button, and while they waited Mac muttered:

"I've got enough now to drive me crazy. Who ever saw such a mess?"

"It will mess up thicker yet," was Dan's comment; "and right off quick."

Tommy opened the door then and whispered eagerly as they entered:

"He's gone out again and told me to wait for him. He's all fussed up about something, and he looked mean. I'd like to get out o' here if I could get another job. I would anyway, only for my kid brother."

"See here, kid!"

Dan put a hand on Tommy's head and turned up a face wet with tears.

"You are all right, and I'll see you through. That's a promise. Don't let his whiskers bluff you; he's a false alarm, and I'll see he treats you right. Just turn in on the couch in there and go to sleep."

Tommy went to his rest greatly comforted, and Dan led the way up three long flights of stairs. McLeod heard him grumbling:

"And a poor bluff at that! Sanitarium! Hm! Only two greenhorns on the job, and open for business tomorrow! Bunk!"

When the lights were switched on in the gymnasium, however, McLeod was delighted with his new quarters. For the moment he forgot other perplexities and called Wheeler to see:

"Look what neat little rooms, Dan—and right next to the bath and locker-rooms. We could be mighty comfortable here. And our stuff is here. Why not unpack?"

Dan had been pacing the floor of the gymnasium, and he stopped to kick a roll of mats.

"Let 'em alone!" he said huskily. "We won't be here long enough. And we are due for a scrap anyway, you and I!"

McLeod faced about and stared. In Wheeler's face there was none of the deadly power that had so benumbed him more than once before. Dan looked at him with an expression that looked more like sympathy—but of course it couldn't be that.

"A scrap—you and I?" Mac murmured vaguely. "What about?"

"Any old thing at all—no matter what," said Dan absently, pinching his chin in thought. "I can't talk plans for sour apples, but I am going to work from the inside on this thing because the time is getting short. It would take all night to tell you, and you'd better not know anyhow. Put up a scrap. It will make my play look all the more convincing.

"But you are in for a bad spell, Mac. I can't help you, so you might as well go to our friend Bridget, the lady detective, if you want advice. Maybe she will tell you to clear out—to go fishing in the Sucksand Pond; see?

"I heard Israfil come in just now, and I am going to chew the rag with him. I want to see if there is a scar under those whiskers. So long Mac!"

Dan was out and down the stairs, while Mac stood with eyes fixed on the spot where the manhandler had stood.

What did Dan mean? Was he converted at last to the belief that Israfil was the arch-thief, the murderer Bouvais himself, and was Dan going over to the enemy? The very thought made McLeod sick and sore at his stomach, and his wits went wool-gathering.

What had Wheeler said? The time was "getting short," and he might better "go fishing in the Sucksand Pond." That meant the diamond necklace, which had not been stolen from the Fifth Avenue house after all and must therefore be sunk in the quicksand up in Vermont.

Wild as it sounded, it must be true. Huen Ling could answer for the reality of the jewels, and his uncle had said—

"Drag the bottom of the Sucksand Pond." adding, as Mac now recollected, "between the two posts."

Could there be "posts" driven in the quicksand?

Mac clutched at his hair to keep his head from flying apart with the whirl of confused ideas. All at once he had an inspiration. There was no sense in getting mixed up with all the things he had heard. All this foolishness about a missing document at Washington, about hypnotism as a means to crime—it was all a clever ruse to confuse and baffle pursuit. His sudden inspiration was simply this—go and get the necklace!

If a fortune in diamonds was lying in the quicksands up in the country, all he had to do was to go and fish it up. It was his by right and by law, and once in his hands let any one try to take it from him!

That was what Wheeler had meant. It couldn't be possible that Dan would turn traitor. What could he be saying to Israfil down-stairs? With new courage Mac started for the stairs; he was going to find out.

SOFTLY he stole down the last flight of stairs and along the hall. Tommy was asleep on the couch in the reception-room, and low voices came from the office across the hall. Mac gained the door and laid his ear against it. He could hear as well as if he were in the room.

"Well, let's stop making pretty speeches and get down to business."

It was Dan's voice.

"What do you offer?" he went on. "I can get good money by giving you up to the police!"

"*Provided* that you could succeed," came the soft, foreign-sounding speech of the charlatan. "But we will not make many words. I will double their figures for your assistance, and you shall sail on the *Kaiser Friedrich* with us."

"Hm!"

Wheeler seemed to hesitate.

"I am to deliver both the necklace and the girl? What do you want of her?"

"Nothing, my friend, nothing; but it is this crazy prince. He can not understand that here things are not as in his own country. He is *épris, tout simplement*, and he will have her. She is therefore the price of our safety—our passport and ticket to Europe and pleasure.

"But it is only necessary that you get her to the city; we can arrange the rest. Only, the time is short from now to Wednesday noon. Moreover, you have disabled my best man tonight. Your skill is marvellous."

Israfil fairly purred in admiration.

"Never mind the compliments," Wheeler said crisply. "What about McGuire?"

"He is a puppet; I pull the strings and he dance. You shall see. But he is not the man for this work. He has not the confidence of the young woman, and you have. You come just in time. I will pay—I must pay—enough to sat-isfy you. And I will do so. You con-sent? Yes?"

"Yes, I'll go up there and see what I can do. It will work unless McLeod beats us to it. I'll have to start tonight."

"Ex-cellent! We shall win! There is a train—let us see——".

A rustling of paper and shuffling of feet.

McLeod ran up the stairs with soft bounding steps, three at a time, and in the little room that was to have been his bedroom he sat panting. What should he say to Wheeler if Dan came up? Surely this was a scheme of Dan's to deceive Israfil, and Dan would tell him about it.

But Wheeler did not come. Mac heard the front door open and close. He rushed to the window and saw the lithe figure go swiftly toward Broadway, turn the corner and disappear.

Dan was off for Vermont to get Mary and the necklace. Now to get there himself before it was too late—to warn Mary Mason and to drag the pond for the necklace! How absurd it sounded—like a dime novel!

He felt in his pockets—less than five dollars; and he must have money at once. He thought of Huen Ling, but he was too far down-town. To go down to Chinatown might mean that he would miss a train. He decided to go up-town and to look for a pawnshop on the way where he could pawn his new watch.

He seized hat and coat, putting them on as he ran down the stairs. In the lower hall he stepped softly, but there was no sound nor light in the office—no sign of Israfil. Mac's heart gave a jump as the thought struck him—he must be in there, this murderer and thief!

Reaching the front door, hand on the night-lock, he thought he heard the office door click, and he got out with panic haste. Israfil, or Bouvais, would not hesitate to kill him and drag his body to the old conduit, if he thought he could do it undetected. Mac breathed more freely as he put distance between him and the sanitarium.

Rushing across-town to Third Avenue because there was a better chance of an all-night pawnshop on that thoroughfare, he raced up-town looking on both sides of the street for three balls.

He thought of Mary Mason, up in the country, and then of Bridget McDevitt. Somehow the beautiful Bridget had been much in his thoughts lately. She had a way of looking at him with those great, dark eyes that was greatly disturbing. And he had spent much of his time in the roomy studio with her.

He was thinking of her, seeing those eyes, when he passed the beer-hall called "The Chapel," and he ran into her heavily.

"I beg your pardon, I— Why. It's you! I was thinking of you," said Mac delightedly. "That was why I didn't see where I was going."

"Is the thought of me so dazzling?"

Bridget looked him in the face very soberly.

"Here is Steve. Can't you see him either?"

Red and redder, Mac shook hands with Collins. He wore straps across his nose, did Collins, but showed he was a man by every word he spoke. And Mac tried not to look at Bridget's trousers. At first he had seen only her wonderful eyes, but now he was painfully conscious that she was got up as a very handsome young man in evening dress, with a long Inverness coat that showed only six inches of trouser. And these were the days—not so long ago—when it was an awful thing for a woman to wear men's clothes.

"I expect you will think of me only with abhorrence after this," said the serious Bridget. "But it's not so shameless; and Steve is a faithful escort. He will not be sent home. Do I look so frightful? Tell me!"

"Now, now!" Collins interposed. "*That's* shameless, all right. I never heard such a barefaced demand for flattery. Woman, you know you do it even better than the divine Vesta* herself."

"I d-d-don't think you could look anything but l-lovely—in anything."

Mac said it with such earnest simplicity that the girl detective, knowing and self-poised as she was, could only flush in competition with Mac himself.

"Oh, don't mind me at all!"

Collins waved his hands aloft.

"I am only supposed to referee this blushing-match. I think I am wanted elsewhere. But beware my vengeance, Lionel Montfort! No man can cross my——"

"What's the trouble? What do you want?"

Bridget spoke to McLeod as if they were alone, drawing him aside from the entrance to the beer-hall. Collins had the tact to saunter to the curb and light a cigar as Mac poured out an incoherent tale that nobody but a woman could have understood. He told of the discovery of the conduit, of Huen Ling's statement that the necklace was real and therefore still to be found; then he came to his climax with Wheeler's treachery.

"I heard them talk through the door. Israfil is the Main Guy of the Spark Gang, and his name is Bouvais—and Wheeler has gone to get both the necklace and Miss Mason."

Mac came down the home-stretch at a great pace:

"I don't know what they are going to do with her. They said something about a 'crazy Prince Heinrich' who was bound to have her. I've got to get up there before

---

* *Vesta Tilly.*

Wheeler, and I've got just five dollars. I was looking for a pawn-shop on the way to the Grand Central, to pawn my watch——"

"You won't have to. Here, take this and run. Wait; don't lose courage if Wheeler beats you—he has got a train already—but keep going. And remember this! I *don't believe* he will do a dirty trick like that. Wire me what you want done at this end—and *go!*"

She started him off with a push, and Mac ran as he was told.

"Good-by. Don't know where you're going, but good luck to you!" Collins shouted after him.

Mac turned his head to see Bridget wave a hand to him and as he did so he drove his shoulder into the chest of one of three promenading toughs. The trio were half-drunk and looking for bother, so after a look about for prowling cops the injured man swung for Mac's jaw.

Followed a dance of five—Mac, three Bowery bounders and Collins, who landed in the middle of it with two jumps— embellished with calisthenics that exercised all the voluntary muscles.

Mac ducked the first blow neatly and caught his man off-balance with his pet uppercut. One man out. Collins' man ducked into a clinch, and the third tough sprang at Bridget, making the natural mistake in gender due to her clothes. The girl sprang back; her assailant followed and got her with a throat-hold just as Mac saw the encounter.

McLeod went wild at the sight, let loose a growl that was half-roar and landed a driving right under the man's ear. It dazed him and loosened his hold; but Mac slugged him again—knocked him out and slugged him again as he dropped. Pouncing on the prostrate form, he choked and would have mauled him to a pulp if the girl had not seized his arm.

"Run—quick! An officer! You'll lose your train if you are run in. Down this street!"

She hissed in his ear as she pulled him away, dragged him around the corner on a cross-street. Here she told him:

"You're a man, Mac, but I'm all right now. Run and save your——"

She stopped for lack of breath. It was not her exertion that robbed her of speech, but McLeod's action.

With a sudden violence he seized the hand on his arm, held it for a moment, looking straight in the big dark eyes, then deliberately kissed it—twice—before he sprinted into the darkness.

As he ran, surprized at himself, he muttered:

"I don't know why I did it, but I'm glad I did. What's the matter with me?"

And the girl detective in man's clothes looked on all sides to see if she was seen, then pressed the hand to her lips with a quick movement that was all woman.

Meanwhile Mac was racing for the station, still much perplexed and uneasy in mind. Could a man be in love with two girls at once? No! Was he off on a fool's errand anyhow? Would Wheeler play him false—and was there anything sunk in the Sucksand Pond after all?

Fretting about these things would get him nowhere, but he could not stop it. So he kept on in the same useless circle until he fell asleep in the seat of a day-coach of a "local"—the only train for Troy before morning.

XI

IT WAS after noon when McLeod got down from the passenger-coach of "the accommodation" and looked about at the familiar little village drowsing in the sun. Stanley Depot ("Deepo"), Vermont, consisted of four small frame dwellings, a cross-roads store, the railroad station and a blacksmith-shop—not counting the horse-shed behind the store.

Mac saw no changes but a coat of paint on the store. The store-keeper-postmaster stood with a mail-bag in his hand looking at him doubtfully.

"Don't you remember Stuart McLeod, Mr. Randall?"

Mac offered his hand.

"Is anybody over from Uncle Jed's? Did he get my wire?"

"I swan! So't is! Glad to see ye, Stuart. Ye-ah, Jed got your tel-egram this mornin'. He's some'rs around—in the shed I guess."

The portly merchant lifted up his voice toward the shed in the rear:

"Hey—Jed! Here's y'r comp'ny. Where be ye? Old mare trompled on ye, hes she?"

Out of the darkness of the shed slowly emerged the rear end of a Concord buggy, also a high-pitched voice:

"No, she hain't! Shet up yer bellerin'! Back—back up, y' old pelter!"

After the buggy backed a fat sorrel mare with dignity and deliberation and after the mare came Uncle Jed, pushing on the bits and talking:

"Hello, Stuart! Got here 't last. I be'n hangin' round since the mornin' train, 'n' prob'bly M'lissy thinks Ol' Nell has run away and strung me all over the ro'd. Whoa, y'old image! What in tunket ye think y're tryin' to do? Whoa now—stan' *still!* Got any trunk, Stuart? Darn glad to see ye, boy!"

And Uncle Jed took Mac's hand in a grip of surprizing power. He was a small, dapper little man with reddish whiskers and keen blue eyes, by no means a typical hayseed. Neatly dressed, with whiskers smoothly trimmed and high-topped "fine boots" well shined, Uncle Jed was a gentleman farmer. He was well-read—although he spoke the local vernacular from choice—and a man of broad interests and of moderate wealth.

He knew from his first keen look at his guest that McLeod was troubled about something—he could give a shrewd guess at the cause—and so kept up a tactful chatter:

"All aboard, Stuart! Climb in and hang on to your hat. Th' old mare ain't had her dinner yet; neither have I. *Whoa,* y' old fool! Stan' still! Whoa, *now!*

With a rising inflection that implied a fearful threat Uncle Jed paused with one foot on the step and glared at the old mare fiercely:

"Ye-e-eh! Darn anxious to go, ain't ye?" with biting sarcasm.

Old Nell turned her head slowly to look at her master and pawed once with a forefoot. Thereupon Uncle Jed whispered to Mac excitedly:

"Christopher! That means she's gettin' mad—ready to balk!"

He hopped in nimbly beside his guest, picked up the reins with studied carelessness and plucked the whip from its socket. Then, having tucked in the linen "duster" and settled himself in his seat, he swished the whip smartly in the air as he conceded recklessly—

"All right then—go it!"

The old mare straightened her neck, considered a moment with ears laid back, then flopped them forward and started at a comfortable jog-trot. Not until then did Uncle Jed look at Mac with a triumphant wink as he confided huskily:

" 'F I'd hit 'er with the whip just once, then she'd 'a' backed until she bust somethin'! Gettin' cranky in her old age, like most of us. Head 'er towards home and make 'er stand for a spell, then when ye get ready to go, she *ain't!* Lick 'er and she'll back—and keep backin'. Git my letter, did ye?"

"Letter? No! What was it about, and when did you write? Anything the matter with M-Miss M-Mason? Is she——"

Mac stammered until Uncle Jed interrupted:

"Mary's all right—was last night anyway. She 'n' her nigger woman is stayin' 't the Stanley House over t' the Middle Town, but she's over 't the house 'most every day."

Uncle Jed faced about to ask abruptly—

"But if ye didn't get my letter what started ye up here?"

"I just found out that Mary was in danger," said Mac, frowning. "Did a man get off the sleeper early this morning—a young man——"

"Nobody got off at the deepo—might have got off over t' the junction."

Uncle Jed kept a keen eye on the young man's face.

"What danger? Some young squirt gone crazy over Mary again? What's he look like?"

"No. It isn't the man I meant. I will tell you about that later."

Mac was confused, and hesitated to tell Uncle Jed his wild tale. He forced a look of confidence as he assured him:

"It will be all right if I can see her first. Perhaps you can take me over to the Middle Town this afternoon."

"Like as not she'll be over," said Uncle Jed. "There! Now ye done it!"

The last was addressed to Old Nell, who had got the reins under her tail. This brought about a strenuous pulling and hauling on the part of Uncle Jed, interspersed with sarcasm and abuse, and ended only when the old gentleman dived over the dashboard to lift off the muscular tail with savage emphasis. He settled back in his seat, flushed with triumph.

"There, durn yer old hide! Yes, I wrote soon as I saw that Alan—your uncle—was dead. I told you you'd better come up and look after your property."

Unconsciously speaking as clear English as he wrote, Uncle Jed ran on:

"He left certain directions for me to carry out when he stopped off for a short visit last month. He didn't look very sick then, but he said he wasn't goin' to last long, and he told me some things I was not to mention to a soul until you came—both of you. Then you and Mary could do as you saw fit.

"Whoa! You prancin' old hippopotamus! Didn't you ever see anybody a-horseback before? Don't be such a dum fool!"

The old mare shied at a pair of saddle-horses who swung out of a shaded cross-road almost under her nose and cantered out of sight around a turn. And Mac got a clear look at the faces of the riders. It was Mary Mason and Wheeler.

BOTH of them nodded to him and Uncle Jed, but made no move to pull up. Mary was smiling and flushed with pleasure, and Mac thought Wheeler's face wore a look of careless scorn as he raised his hat. He was not wearing riding-togs, but sat his horse with the easy grace that never left him.

"He rides like a cow-puncher," remarked Uncle Jed, who had made his money in the gold-rush to the West. "And he looks like a bad one to stir up. Friend of yours?"

Mac looked pale as he said:

"That's just what I'd like to know. I thought he was until last night."

"Well, he don't look like he'd change his mind easy."

Uncle Jed watched Mac a-slant.

"Have a row, did ye?"

"Not exactly."

Mac hesitated, uncertain where to begin.

"Well, you can go over to the hotel at Middle Town this afternoon," said Uncle Jed. "Dar-r-rn that *tail!*"

By the time Uncle Jed had won his duel with the old mare Mac had fallen a prey to old associations roused by the sights and smells about him. In spite of the worry he carried with him he was carried back to the days when he fished the stream that ran beside the road through the "Dugway," and the smells out of the woods brought the ache of vague longing. So the silence remained unbroken until they came out of the beech grove and could see down the valley to the place where he had lived.

The house had burned six years before, and grass was growing into the cellar-hole over the crumbled foundations. Beyond lay the Sucksand Pond, and then came Uncle Jed's solid old farmhouse under the maples. He asked abruptly—

"Do the boys go fishing for bullheads in the Sucksand Pond at night now?"

"By mighty!"

Uncle Jed jumped in his seat.

"What made you ask that if you didn't get my letter? How much did your uncle tell you?"

"He told me just enough to leave it in doubt whether he sank a fortune in diamonds in the Sucksand Pond or not," Mac blurted out desperately. "And the man riding with Miss Mason is up here after them!"

"Git *ap!*"

Uncle Jed brought down the whip along the whole length of Old Nell's side. The result was a surprized flourish of the doughty tail that again landed on the reins. Over the dashboard Uncle Jed once more dived, tugged, and came to an upright position, saying:

"Alan always *was* as odd as Dick's hatband! What in Tophet would he sink a lot of diamonds in the pond for? And if he did, why didn't he tell somebody so's 't they could be sure? He left me hangin' on the same hook. He sank something there and told me you'd come up here treasure-huntin' some day. Said show you the place to fish for it.

"But he always did like to make folks' eyes stick out, Alan did; used to say he knew the old colonel sank his plate and jewels in the pond, and some day they'd make a McLeod rich. He knew better, but he got a lot o' fun out of the way folks would go around shakin' their heads and sayin' he was cracked."

Uncle Jed held the reins high and touched up the old mare.

"Git ap, there! Fooled ye that time!"

"He did sink something in the pond?" Mac asked eagerly. "Was it between two posts?"

"Yes. 'Twas! There's two posts or piles-like—locust, I guess; been there ever since I c'n remember. They don't come to the top o' the water, and won't ever rot, and that's where he said to fish for treasure.

"I wa'n't sure whether he was foolin' or not, but I ain't slept real sound a night since for fear some o' the boys might come bullheadin' and stumble on it. They don't come now—got a story round the place is haunted by the old colonel's ghost. I bet somebody saw Alan potterin' round there."

Uncle Jed seemed to grow more excited all the time.

"Well, better keep mum before M'lissy—There she is, lookin' for ye."

M'lissy was Uncle Jed's sister, who ruled him and his house with such wisdom and firmness that he had never married; and she believed in managing men-folks. So it was mid-afternoon before Mac got away, to walk to "the Village," known as "Middle Town o' Stanley."

He went " 'cross-lots" through the big grove of sugar-maples, still puzzling over Wheeler's behavior and his own plans, to see Mary Mason and warn her. He must stop her from going back to New York with Dan, at any cost.

But in this peaceful beauty of the woods it was hard to make her peril seem real, and he kept seeing her smile of happiness as she rode with Wheeler. Could he make her believe his improbable story of Dan's treachery and the plan to carry her off?

Where the path came out of the "sugar-bush" to the edge of a broad meadow he stopped. Mary was coming toward him on the way to Uncle Jed's.

He was still in the shade and she facing the sunlight, so she did not see him until she came within the shadow, almost within reach. She stopped with a quick indrawn breath and stood staring for a startled moment.

"You—you have not met Dan Wheeler then?" she asked.

"Only when I saw him with you."

Mac went at his task, head down:

"You m-must n-not go with him—back to New York or anywhere! I c-c-came to tell you about—about the necklace. I— You——"

"Is that all?"

Mary's voice was hard.

"Then you might better have stayed in New York."

"No—no! You d-d-don't understand!" Mac blundered on. "If I had the necklace—or the money it would bring—you would have a lot more——"

"You will never understand!"

Mary stopped him with some heat.

"Money is not the only thing in the world, and you will only make trouble here. Dan—Wheeler—is at Uncle Jed's now, looking for you—to tell you——"

"And you are looking for him!" flared Mac, driven to his ruin by her hesitation and confusion on Wheeler's name. "Have you told him everything? Do you want him to rob me—to steal from both of us? He knows the diamonds are in the quicksand, and he is after them. He is Israfil's man, and Israfil is the very thief my uncle was afraid of. He has bought Wheeler—he sent Wheeler after the diamonds and *you!* You are to be carried off as soon as——"

"You may as well save your breath," she broke in, very white and frigid. "I know all of that and much besides. If you will listen to Mr. Wheeler you will save a lot of trouble, and— There he is now! Why *didn't* you stay in the city?"

She was staring up the path by which Mac had come, frightened and trembling.

"Remember what your uncle told you, and *don't* make him angry! You know, he is so——"

She stopped with a hand at her throat.

McLeod turned, to see a swift figure moving toward him along the sun-dappled path through the woods. In the moment of waiting he felt a familiar chill of dread, a consciousness again that this had happened before in a fearful dream and would happen now in spite of all he could do to stop it.

WHEELER came straight on until Mac could see his long green eyes with the dancing glitter in them that spelled danger. But they were fixed on Mary, and it was to the girl that Dan spoke in a low, even tone!

"What does he want? And how much does he know?"

"Talk to me if there is any man left in you!"

Mac stood with hands clenched and poised as if for a spring.

Slowly Wheeler swung his level-lidded gaze to Mac's grim face. He did not open his thin lips, but they curled a bit—made Dan's threatening face a shade more coldly scornful.

McLeod could hold in no longer.

"Listen to me, Wheeler! My uncle believed in you. You have fooled some others—but I heard you make your deal with Israfil! I have been kicked about and set aside and treated like a child long enough; I am going to take a hand in my own affairs now myself. I want to tell you, right here and now, that you are not going to deliver 'the necklace and the girl' to Jean

Bouvais if I can stop it. You will have to kill me first!"

Mac was facing Wheeler now, standing between him and the girl as if to protect Mary with his body.

Wheeler's face never altered a line, but the devil-lights in his eyes seemed to dance faster as he said dryly:

"You got your lines all right, Mac, but your 'business' is rotten. You ought to hiss down the back of my neck, so we can both face the audience. Did you see Bridget McDevitt before you left town? See him blush, Miss Mason! I can't kill a man who blushes like that. Well, what did she say, Mac?"

"I will tell you. You have fooled her too," Mac came back quickly. "She thinks you have something up your sleeve and will be square with me. But she didn't hear you talk to Bouvais—and I did. You can kill me, no doubt—you have got used to that sort of thing, and it's right in your line—but that is the only way you can go through with this thing."

McLeod now was speaking with a cool determination much more convincing. Dan narrowed his eyes.

"Good leather! That sounds more like it. But I don't guess it's as bad as all that, Mac. I can't put you wise to the whole thing, because you would sure spill all the beans; but *if* you will just keep out you will be glad you did, after it's all over. Listen to me and don't butt in!"

In spite of his grim resolve, McLeod was almost persuaded by Wheeler's quiet appeal. He knew that it was much for Dan to concede—that probably he had never before shown such forbearance to any man. There must be some reason for it. Was it because of Mary Mason, who was looking on? Mac turned to her.

"You will not go to the city with him?"

He held out a hand in appeal.

"I—" Mary looked at Wheeler submissively—"I can't—promise that."

That look—the girl looking to Wheeler for his approval or command—fired Mac afresh. He whirled on Wheeler.

"Dan Wheeler, I can't trust you, and you won't trust me enough to tell me what you propose to do. So I tell you straight out, I am going to stay here and keep her from going. Moreover I am going to take this necklace business in my own hands, and I warn you not to try to interfere. I have reached the end of my patience, and I shall stop at nothing. I can shoot if I am forced to it—and I will!"

"All right; that is straight talk. Let it go at that."

Dan turned from him coolly and said to Mary:

"Our plans will not be changed, Miss Mason. You know the time and the place."

He lifted his hat and turned on his heel. He did not look at McLeod again, or he would have seen Mac go white with rage, but started back by the same path over which he had come.

He had not taken two steps when Mac sprang at him with a growl of senseless fury. Dan turned his head just in time to duck a knockout blow that Mac aimed at his ear. His soft hat was knocked off as they came together and clinched.

Swept backward by McLeod's rush, Wheeler slipped on a root and went down, holding tight. Mac saw himself triumphant as he fell with Wheeler under him, and he was reaching for Dan's throat when something happened too quickly for him to understand it.

Dan broke Mac's hold while they were falling, put back one hand to the ground beneath him, and the result was a rolling twist as they landed—McLeod rolling underneath. Above him Wheeler's cold face looked down without anger. He heard Mary call clearly—

"Don't—don't hurt him, Dan!"

Roused to frantic effort, Mac writhed on to his face, doubled up and heaved, caught at a tree-trunk and managed to pull himself staggering to his feet—got up to face Wheeler once more. Although he had seen Wheeler's invincible skill and power, he felt no fear as he drove at Dan with all his power and a bit more.

He fought fast and cleverly, using all he knew and conscious of every foot of ground underneath, working round to get the light in Dan's eyes. Twice—three times—he drove at Dan's unguarded face, and the last time he landed.

Still the blow seemed to lack force as Dan's head gave way before it, and Mac was carried off-balance—left wide open to a return blow.

Even as he stumbled and caught himself, Mac felt with a shock of surprize that Wheeler was playing with him. Dan had let him recover and stood waiting contemptuously for him to come again. It was the last flick on the raw—the last possible humiliation; and Mac lost his temper entirely.

He went at his man with a whirlwind rush, striking wildly and reckless of consequences. A chance blow caught Wheeler under the ear and he staggered. Mac sprang at him to finish him.

He felt Dan give way, clutched for a throat-hold as he threw his weight upon him—he had him!

But at that moment he felt a downward tug at his collar—a foot in his stomach—his feet left the earth.

Then the whole surrounding country turned a somersault—up and over him—the turf smote him in the back and knocked the breath out of him. He lay looking up into a swimming sky beyond the tree-tops, and Wheeler's face came in between.

"Please—please don't! What are you——"

It was Mary's beseeching voice he heard, interrupted by Wheeler's slightly hoarse voice—

"Can't have him fussing around for a while."

Dan's hands caught him at the base of his throat on each side—jabbed in with steely cruelty. For one frightful instant Mac's chest was crushed—his bowels torn asunder; but before he could scream his whole body went numb and left him. He thought of fighting, but could not even move a muscle; there was nothing left to move! Was he beheaded? He heard Dan, at a great distance, say—

"He will be all right in an hour or so."

And at the same time he sank into deep, stifling darkness. It swelled over him like a sea, and like a sea it took his breath.

HE OPENED his eyes in Uncle Jed's sitting-room. Mary got up from a chair and came to him with a cry of relief.

"Thank Heaven! I thought you were never coming out of it—you didn't breathe more than four times to the minute. Are you in pain?"

"No."

Mac had to gasp for breath between words.

"Hard to breathe—that's all. Be all right—in a minute. How did I—come here?"

He turned his face to the open window beside the sofa, for the cool breeze.

"Lonnie and I brought you in the buggy, around by the road," Mary whispered hurriedly.

Lonnie was Uncle Jed's man, who lived in the "tenant house" and did the farmwork. Mary went on to explain—

"They think you had a heat-stroke and struck your head as you fell."

"Better leave it that way."

Mac was getting his breath rapidly.

"Sorry I played fool again, and frightened you."

"You didn't frighten me. What was that awful thing he did to you? That was horrible—horrible!"

Mary shuddered.

"Just a ju-jutsu trick—I have heard of it. Where is everybody?"

"Aunt Melissa is fixing something for you to take—and you must take it. Uncle Jed has gone to harness up—said he was going for the doctor if you didn't come to in an hour, and— Here he comes now!"

"How is he now, Mary?" Uncle Jed asked in a stage-whisper from the porch, then put his head in at the door.

"Perfectly all right, Uncle Jed."

Mac answered for himself, sitting up and rubbing his legs, which still were a bit numb.

"I had a tumble, that's all. Well as ever now."

"Darned likely story. Don't take any stock in it—not a mite."

Uncle Jed tried to be severe, but showed his delight in every feature.

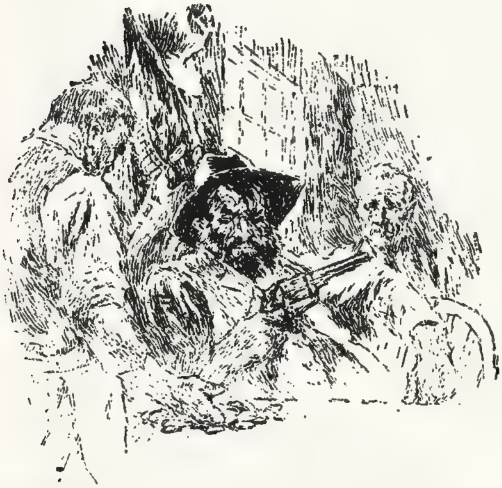
"See to 't ye don't cut up any more such didoes around here unless ye want me to chuck ye into the Sucksand Pond and leave ye there. Come up here and scare the daylights out of the hull family! What ye givin' him, M'lissy?"

"Some good thoroughwort tea," said the good woman, who appeared from the kitchen with a steaming bowl. "Nothin' so stren'thenin' in the world. Drink it all, Stuart, and lay right down and keep still."

"He'll lay down and keep still 'f he dooes, I bet ye! What he wants is a good stiff horn of brandy. Wait a minute!"

While Uncle Jed went for his own prescription McLeod had a hard fight to keep from swallowing a variety of household remedies proposed in series by Aunt Melissa. He gained an ally in Uncle Jed by taking the old gentleman's first remedy, and at last succeeded in getting him to go for a walk down to the pond. He did it only after proving that he was quite all right by eating a hearty supper, so it was after dark before Mac could get Uncle Jed far enough away from the house to tell him the plan he had in mind.

TO BE CONCLUDED



THE BIG LITTLE MAN

by Howard E. Morgan

FROM the first, Minerva City had been of divided opinion in regard to "Shorty" Wilson. Still, Shorty might have completed his brief sojourn treading his own mild-mannered, inconspicuous way without the matter being settled one way or the other, if he had not mistakenly removed his belt upon entering Piggy Corcoran's Restaurant. Of course, attached to this belt were Shorty's two well-worn .45's.

But who, not possessing the power of second sight, could have foreseen the startling events that were to come to pass on the sleepy main street of Minerva City this hot August afternoon? Certainly not Shorty Wilson. And foresight was his long suit. Within the forty crowded years of his life Shorty had seldom come out second best in any sort of proposition involving preparedness.

But there was something about the Summers in Montana that got him. Texas at its worst could not compare with them. This particular day it was exceedingly warm, even for Montana, and, having ridden sixty miles since daybreak without a bite to eat, Shorty was tired and disgusted and hungry and hot, when the glaring red sign above Piggy's hash house invited him to enter. The first thing he thought of, after properly disposing of his horse, was to remove every stitch of useless clothing. The heavy belt, and incidentally the guns, came first to hand. But everything looked so peaceful——

"Howdy, sheriff," Piggy greeted Shorty loudly.

But Shorty was not deceived. A mischievous twinkle shone in Piggy's good eye. Ever since Shorty had taken over the job of temporary sheriff of Corona County—replacing Lem Halloway, who was down with a broken shoulder—this poorly concealed amusement had been manifest among many of the citizens of Minerva City.

Shorty gave no indication that he saw. His freckled face twisted sociably, and his uneven teeth showed briefly through the dust-coated lips in a grin. Shorty was always friendly. Too friendly. That was just it. And such a little runt, with drab, colorless hair, pale, apologetic blue eyes, a game leg—rheumatism likely—and quiet; scarcely ever opened his mouth.

Still, Lem Halloway had imported him from Texas for the job, hence Minerva City accepted him to the extent that no one had as yet actually picked on him. They were waiting for a good opportunity, however, that was all. And of course there was just the chance that the little cuss might pack a kick. Stranger things had happened.

"Gimme a cup o' coffee first. Then some ham an' eggs. An' after that some more ham an' eggs, an' then some more coffee."

He continued to grin.

Corcoran slid the thick mug of coffee across the counter. From his seat at a nearby table Shorty rolled a cigaret and eyed the fragrant nectar longingly. Piggy was supposed to bring him that coffee. He knew. Piggy usually waited on customers. It was a sign of his disfavor, an open insult in fact, when a customer was required to wait on himself. Shorty puffed on his cigaret for a time, then shrugged good-naturedly, limped up to the counter and carried the mug of coffee back to his table.

After the second order of ham and eggs and the fourth cup of coffee Shorty leaned back in his rickety chair and surveyed the occupants of the room sociably, finally focusing his pale-blue eyes on Corcoran.

"Business good?"

"Tol'able, tol'able. Nothin' much t' brag about. How's sheriffin'?"

Again came that half-wink in Piggy's good eye.

Piggy knew, Shorty knew, Minerva City knew, that in the three months covering Shorty's tenure of office, nothing, absolutely nothing, had happened to call for the services of a sheriff.

But Shorty refused to be baited.

"Nothin' doin' so fur. Somethin's apt t' break 'most any time, though. Never kin tell."

Piggy winked outright in the general direction of a couple of sheep-herders lounging over the greasy counter.

"You said somethin', sheriff."

"How come?"

Shorty was mildly interested.

Piggy cleared his throat the better to propound the news.

"Big Pete Kadgely is in town."

It didn't seem to register. Shorty politely inclined his ear toward the speaker—he was a bit deaf anyhow—for the further enlightenment that he felt sure should come. A complete and expectant silence was his only answer. When he finally looked up it was to find Corcoran watching him, unconcealed amusement on his fat face. The sheep-herders were also laughing.

"Well, what of it?"

Still Shorty was not riled.

"Didn't Lem never tell y'u?"

"Cain't say as how he did. Who is this *hombre*, Kadgely?"

Piggy Corcoran gave vent to his feelings in a long, raucous burst of laughter.

"Mebbeso you'll find out pretty quick, sheriff. Big Pete usually gits hungry 'bout this time o' day. I got things all framed fer him. The best thing he does is eat sheriffs. How about it, boys? Now, Lem, Lem Halloway, never took sass from nobody in his life, 'ceptin' only this here Pete.

"Playful cuss, Pete is. Oncet Lem follered him up into the hills. Two days later he come back, lookin' kinda sad an' quiet-like; but he come alone. Pete wa'n't with him. An' ever since, 'bout once a month, Pete comes in here an' raises —— in general an' Lem never so much as raises a finger. Usually figgers on bein' away somewheres. If I didn't know he was sure enough laid up right now, I'd say he was playin' 'possum just becuz it was time fer Pete t' hop down offn his mount'in an' turn Minerva City upside down."

For the first time Shorty was really haired up. The anemic-looking cigaret flamed angrily between his yellow fingers. His pale-blue eyes flashed.

"Y'u kin keep any ideas y'u got 'bout Lem Halloway t' yourself, Corcoran."

Piggy's bead-like eyes glinted angrily at the unexpected rebuff; but he had been lying about Halloway, and although his lips formed a suitable reply, caution got the better of inclination and he devoted his energies to a whirlwind polishing of the white pine counter.

"Tell me some more 'bout this feller, Kadgely?"

Shorty's inquiry was civil enough. It was apparent that his brief flare of anger had left him.

"Ain't no more t' tell," Piggy sulked. " 'Ceptin' as how he lives up in the foot-hills of Bald Mountain somewheres. Prospects some, guides huntin'-parties in the Fall. Got two sons, they say, husky young *hombres*, full o' fun, just like Pete is."

A HEAVY step sounded on the rickety porch. From where Shorty sat he could not see the door. Still he might have taken his cue from the sheep-herders, who hastily ducked behind the counter. But he didn't, nor did thought of the absent guns enter his mind.

"Wow!"

The stentorian yell filled the little room from wall to wall.

Shorty pivoted slowly about.

It was Big Pete right enough. A giant. At a rough calculation Shorty figured that he stood six feet four. And broad in proportion, with a mass of silky black whiskers, bloodshot eyes, great, hairy, paw-like hands, a gun at either hip—and an all pervading odor that spoke volumes for its potency. Withal the giant's step was firm. Shorty gulped mechanically.

"Apple pie an' coffee. Shake 'em up, y'u Corcoran."

Piggy had anticipated the order; a huge piece of apple pie made its appearance on the counter as if by magic, accompanied by a steaming mug of black coffee.

But even in his half-drunken condition Big Pete's mental faculties were not impaired. Perhaps he knew Piggy of old. Anyhow, before biting into the inviting chunk of pastry he raised the upper covering gingerly. A generous sprinkling of green mold came to light.

With a roar like a wounded bull Big Pete came to his feet. Despite the tempest of sound that battered at his eardrums, Shorty approved whole-heartedly of the wonderful string of curses that came from the big man's lips. They did justice to a Texas mule skinner.

"Y'u —— —— —— ——! Tryin' t' p'isin me was y'u? An' me a good customer! Why, y'u, y'u——"

Words failed him. He choked impotently.

Piggy hastily produced more pie and dodged like a colored side-show artist to avoid the discarded pastry.

This time the pie met with Big Pete's growling approval. And he was hungry. The pie disappeared in no more than a dozen huge bites. But he was still in a rage.

"A man cud be hung fer doin' a thing like that. He sure cud."

Big Pete addressed the bare wall confidentially.

Piggy came slowly to light from behind the counter.

"I've a good mind t' put the sheriff on yer trail, that's whut I hev."

Big Pete's sense of injustice took a maudlin form.

Piggy promptly saw a way to turn it all into a joke. His one round eye gleamed malevolently.

"Sheriff, did y'u say, Pete? There he is, right behind you."

Big Pete turned. Shorty didn't bat an eyelash.

"Sheriff? That little runt?"

Big Pete's guffaw shook the windows.

Shorty's eyes flickered toward his guns. They reposed within a foot of the giant's elbow.

He grinned amiably, but shifted uneasily about in his chair.

Wiping the tears from his eyes, Big Pete observed Shorty appraisingly.

"The sheriff! Fer —— sake! The sheriff! Tha's right; Lem Halloway is hurt, ain't he?"

The dawning of an idea suddenly flooded his heavy face with tiny spiderings of suppressed mirth. He leaned toward Shorty confidentially. So close did he come that Shorty could scarcely breathe.

"D' y'u know, little man, s'funny thing; I never been 'rested. No, sir. Never. Now, f'rinstance, I'm drunk right now, ain't I? Been disturbin' the peace fer two days. Ain't that enough t' git arrested fer, sheriff?"

"No, not necessarily; not where I come from— I don't know— That is——"

Shorty foundered.

Big Pete glared owlishly. His seriousness was ludicrous. Still, no one laughed. He continued in his apparent attempt to asphyxiate Shorty.

"Now, little feller, just what would I hev t' do t' git 'rested? I wunt t' git 'rested."

His insistence was pathetic.

Shorty forced a smile. Those two good guns were as far away as ever. He thought rapidly. Pete wasn't a crook anyway—just playful, Corcoran had said.

"W'y, robbery, say——"

Big Pete was still drunkenly serious.

"Robbery? Robbery? How would it do— Say Piggy here——"

Like a flash one of the long-barreled .45's left the big man's holster. Its menacing throat unwaveringly fronted Corcoran's abdomen.

"Come across, y'u —— squint-eye. I'm goin' t' git 'rested, I am. Money I wants."

Piggy's face went white.

"But, Pete, the sheriff was only jokin'. Y'u don't mean t'——"

"Shell out, —— y'u!"

There was no mistaking that bellowing

demand. Piggy shelled out, two double handfuls of gold and silver coins.

With a single motion Pete swept the money into a capacious pocket. Then with a truly wistful expression he leaned toward Shorty.

"Now, Mr. Sheriff, will y'u please 'rest me? That is, if y'u kin do it. *If y'u kin do it.*"

His bleary gaze swept Shorty's slight figure; then with a deep-throated laugh he swaggered out into the street.

Shorty watched the dust-cloud containing the big man gyrate across the street and into Simon Cosgood's livery stable. Then he arose and leisurely strapped on his guns. At the door he paused and grinned back into Piggy's twitching white face.

"Ain't so sure thet I kin bring yer money back, Corcoran, but I expect as how—barrin' the unexpected—thet we kin oblige Mr. Kadgely by givin' him his room rent free fer a spell."

And as Piggy still remained speechless:

"Purty good joke, wasn't it? Pete sure is a playful feller, like you said."

Corcoran's burst of pent-up rage was muffled by the slam of the door.

* * *

TWO hours later Shorty's sleek roan mare stuck her dusty nose into Apache Creek where it curved abruptly about the foot-hills of Bald Mountain. Two miles up the mountainside, a tiny log cabin, dimmed by the haze, held first place in the center of a considerable clearing. After drinking sparingly, himself, Shorty resumed his methodical journey.

That must be Big Pete's place. Pete himself was no more than half an hour ahead. His big stallion's hoofprints were clearly outlined in the moist earth of the shaded trail that, twisting indolently aside for every bush and sapling, climbed leisurely upward.

Shorty pondered. It had been a good joke on Corcoran all right, the loud-mouthed son of a gun. And a good joke on him, too. Well, it was never too late to learn.

Nearing the clearing, Shorty dismounted, loosened the guns in their holsters and advanced cautiously through the long-trunked pines, his head at an attentive angle. Hearing was not so good as it once was. A partridge lifted on whirring wings and roared away into the checkered shadows. Shorty swore softly.

On the carpet of feathery pine needles he had lost the stallion's trail, but this did not trouble him. Big Pete would no doubt be at the cabin. Shorty tethered his horse in a clump of scrub spruce, then crept on to the forest edge.

The cabin, a substantial affair constructed of huge logs, seemingly occupied the exact geometric center of perhaps half an acre of stump-littered, boulder-strewn open space. A crude roadway, twisting in and about around the stumps and boulders, completely circled the clearing. Near one end of this clearing was a weed-infested garden, irrigated by a shallow ditch which ended in a mudhole strewn with broken bottles and rusty tin cans.

There was no sign of Big Pete, but seated on a log near the little garden were two boys. Big, hulking youngsters they were, man-size already—fitting sons of Big Pete Kadgely. A couple of rangy mountain ponies browsed near by. As Shorty watched, one of the boys seized a pony and held the startled beast by the nose while his brother forced a discarded cud of tobacco down the animal's throat. The suffering beast coughed and wheezed and rolled its eyes in agony. The jokers laughed uproariously.

Shorty took an instant and violent dislike to Big Pete's progeny. If it weren't for the business in hand, he would——

He sprang suddenly erect. At the last moment his good ear had brought warning. But not quite soon enough. A mighty arm clasped him from the rear. A gusty laugh sounded in his ears. Big Pete materialized from out of the shadows.

In response to his call the two boys came running, expectant grins on their dark faces. Many turns of rope quickly replaced Big Pete's arm, and Shorty was lifted, jerked and dragged out into the open. Big Pete held whispered consultation with the boys. The three of them held their sides with laughter. Then Big Pete mounted the black stallion, and the rope binding Shorty was made fast to his saddle.

Shorty noticed that Big Pete had laid aside his gun belt.

"So, little man, y'u really was goin' t' 'rest me! Haw, haw, haw! Guess y'u don't know Big Pete Kadgely. Now we'll take a leetle ride around the boys' racetrack, y'u an' me. Kinda rough it is; but you're a tough little runt, I figger. The boys'll enjoy this. Playful they be, jest like their dad. Y'see, I fergot t' bring 'em anythin' from the town, an'—this sure will amuse 'em."

Shorty did not reply. His mouth was a bloodless line in the sun-bitten face. With one hand he was working feverishly upward toward his belt where there was a tiny penknife, along with a box of safety matches, in a hidden pocket.

"Yip!"

The black horse sprang into the air, and Shorty sprawled headlong at the end of the rope. For a time he devoted every effort to evading the stumps and ragged boulders. He twisted half about to favor the bad leg. His writhing body plowed madly through a litter of mud and filth, struck against a hidden stump, bounced off at a tangent, slid over a rough-edged rock. His head struck glancingly. Blackness, illumined with sporadic red flares, danced before his eyes. Half-unconscious, his resistless body was dragged twice about the clearing. But never for an instant did his hand cease its struggle toward that hidden pocket.

Big Pete finally stopped. Shorty struggled to his knees. Something soft and smelly landed with a liquid plop against his cheek; another struck him on the head; still another squarely in the mouth. Rotten tomatoes. The boys were enjoying themselves. Their shrill laughter was undoubted evidence.

Big Pete egged them on. Shorty's fingers closed on the knife. Purposely he fell forward. When he again came to his knees he was free of the rope. Like a cat he jumped to his feet, seized his belt which Pete had carelessly hung over a limb and turned, a gun in each hand.

But Pete had disappeared in the thicket, leaving the black horse behind. A shout of mocking laughter dared the sheriff to follow. And even as Shorty hesitated, still another tomato pursued its liquid way close by his head. For an instant he faced the grinning youngsters; a half-smile distorted his filth-smeared face. Then he turned away, limping painfully, and fetched the roan mare from the bush. The boys, their supply of over-ripe tomatoes exhausted, squatted on their log and followed his movements with insolent eyes.

For a time Shorty fumbled aimlessly behind the horse's back; then—a tenuous, writhing something shot suddenly into the air and with a whirring swish settled firmly about the boys' shoulders, clasped them both tightly and brought them together with a crash. With noses bleeding, quite breathless, they were helpless in Shorty's skilful hands. Trussed up like Christmas turkeys, they were finally tumbled unceremoniously on the ground.

But Shorty had only started. Among other refuse at the side of the cabin was an iron-bound empty hogshead. He rolled this out into the roadway. In a matter of seconds the frightened youngsters found themselves stretched around the big keg's bulging circumference, their hands and feet joined tightly underneath. In this position a considerable portion of youthful blue overall showed uppermost.

Slowly and deliberately Shorty braided together half a dozen six-foot lengths of stout rope. The young bullies watched open-mouthed. When the braiding was finished to Shorty's satisfaction, he spat on his hands and grinned pleasantly.

"Now, young fellers, I'm goin' to give y'u somethin' I expect as how y'u been needin' a long, long time."

He raised the braided rope high above his head and brought it down heartily on the thin blue overalls. Twin yelps of pain testified to the whole-hearted energy behind that flailing knout. Shorty laughed. The hogshead rocked wildly.

Pausing only to make sure of his aim, the little man again applied the knotted rope. Again and again he swung until his breath came quick and the sweat oozed in little rivulets down his grimy cheeks. The shrill yelps of pain had turned to curses—curses that made Shorty pause to marvel at the expertness of the younger generation—and finally to sobbing pleas for mercy. To all of which the self-appointed disciplinarian paid not the slightest heed.

The task finally accomplished to his satisfaction, however, he slashed the ropes and turned abruptly away into the thicket at the point where Papa Pete had disappeared. The roan mare he left behind. Big Pete had made straight for the hills. Of this he was certain. The horse would be useless.

On a rocky knoll Shorty circled about limpingly. But Pete had made no effort to hide his tracks. They carried straight away, onward and upward toward the glistening, naked dome of Bald Mountain. Shorty struggled across a log-littered depression and on up a steep slope. It was still hot. Shimmering heat-waves danced and blurred on the sunlit pathway.

There were several more hours of daylight. Shorty tightened his belt and pushed on.

Pete's probable intent would be to lead him on a heart-breaking chase up the mountain, to leave him exhausted and impotent in a blind cañon perhaps—Big Pete knew these hills—then to return to town and hold him up to ridicule. However, this unsavory program was likely to change. Many things might happen. The one and only thing that registered as an absolute certainty in Shorty's mind was that by hook or crook, sooner or later—he would get Big Pete Kadgely.

The sweating effort set Shorty's lacerated body to throbbing; the bad leg dragged queerly, oftentimes refusing his bidding. But he shut his teeth against the pain and with narrow shoulders bent low, stumbled onward and upward.

But Big Pete's judgment of the sheriff of Corona County had been based purely on the little man's evident physical inferiority. Shorty's possible equipment from the neck up had not entered into his calculations. And so it was that——

At every pause for breath, Shorty's keen eyes minutely inspected the upward trail. Finally his patience was rewarded. Big Pete's figure was outlined pigmy-like briefly against a sun-washed ridge of yellow sandstone. Shorty squatted on a moss-covered boulder, lit a cigaret and followed Big Pete's toiling progress up the face of a cliff, to the rock-strewn summit of Bald Mountain itself. After painstakingly inspecting the backward trail, Pete started leisurely downward. Shorty mapped out the big man's probable course in the back of his head, then, much refreshed by the long rest, cut at a shallow arc about the mountainside. He had no intention of heading Big Pete off. He had other plans.

An hour later, the sheriff slipped out from behind a clump of sumach scrub on to the trail not a hundred yards behind his quarry.

BIG PETE'S progress was most leisurely. Every few rods he rested. It was as Shorty had suspected. The liquor had lost its kick. The big man's face was white, his body atremble.

Shorty slid a .45 out of his belt. He laughed silently. Big Pete hauled forth a huge handkerchief and mopped his face. Just as he was about to take advantage of the natural seat afforded by a flat-topped boulder, Shorty's gun roared. The whistling bullet literally dusted off the rock within an inch of Big Pete's descending corduroy pants. With a wild yell, the big man sprang into the air. Another shot plopped solidly into a beech tree not a foot from his head; still another plowed up the gravel at his feet.

Urged by his jumpy nerves, unreasoning panic took hold upon him. He paused not to marvel at the jinnee-like speed of that bow-legged, bedraggled figure who grinned down at him through a cluster of sumach scrub. The menacing roar of that six gun claimed his interest to the exclusion of all else. With but a single backward glance he turned and sprinted pellmell down the side of the mountain.

Shorty grinned and addressed a chattering red squirrel confidentially:

"Pete seems to hev plumb lost his sense o' humor. Ain't it the truth?"

Now for the first time Shorty hurried. Half a mile farther on he came upon his quarry just about to kneel before a bubbling spring. He turned loose a veritable fusillade of shots. Quite promptly Pete decided to drink farther on.

And so it went. The trip down the ragged slope of Bald Mountain was made in record time. Nearing the bottom, the big man's distress was increasingly evident. Conversely Shorty was just getting his second wind; the bad leg was limbering up. Whenever Pete would have stopped, but for an instant's breathing spell, the roar of that menacing gun urged him on.

It still lacked an hour of darkness when the twinkling lights of Minerva City began to appear one by one through the sparse thicket fringing the shore of Roaring Brook. Shorty was prepared for some sort of a showdown at Roaring Brook. But his wildest imaginings might never have approached the actual.

Roaring Brook was usually naught but a laughing brook, as its surname implied; it served as the major watershed for the entire Boldrewood Range, however, and following even a sizable shower, it was metamorphosed into a rushing, roaring mountain torrent. Just now it was roaring. Even with his poor ear Shorty heard it at a distance, pounding furiously at the jagged rocks that disputed its headlong journey. Roaring Brook must be crossed. There was no alternative.

And Big Pete was at a loss. Like a

cornered rat he scurried along the bank. Shorty followed curiously. At a bend in the stream he came upon Big Pete suddenly. A mighty log, scrubbed clean by the action of tons of hurrying water, adequately spanned the raging torrent.

Big Pete crouched on the log not ten feet from shore. His face was livid. Fear, stark fear, shone from his eyes. He was afraid—of that slippery log, of that rushing stream—of death.

Shorty was first surprized, then amused. He laughed silently. It was too good to be true. Pete searched Shorty's dirt-smeared face beseechingly. But in those mild blue eyes he found no hint of sympathy.

Balancing precariously, Pete groped inside his shirt and produced a red bandanna handkerchief. This he passed on to Shorty. It was Corcoran's money. Shorty pocketed it.

"Git goin', y'u big ham. Got to prod y'u, hev I?"

The little man did not seem to be particularly impressed with the peace offering; instead, he raised the gun suggestively. Big Pete's staring eyes followed the red bandanna handkerchief out of sight, then turned toward that menacing gun; then he moistened his dry lips and with eyes fixed intently on the opposite shore, wriggled along the log.

In the middle of the log he stopped again. His face was a sickly gray-green. His big body weaved uncertainly. Standing erect, Shorty walked farther out on the log. Within arm's length of Pete he also stopped and observed the rushing torrent below speculatively. At no place was the water more than six feet deep. But it swept along at express-train speed, pounding furiously at the mighty boulders, at rearing juts of shale forming the shoreline, as if intent upon clearing all incumbrances from its path.

A hundred yards below, there was another bend. Here the swirling water spun out over a tiny basin lined with yellow sand, then dropped abruptly away again into a considerable waterfall, soon to dissipate its energies among the fertile meadow lands bordering Minerva City.

Big Pete turned and roared something at the frozen-faced nemesis behind him. But Shorty apparently did not hear. A broad grin wreathed his thin lips. Balancing on his good leg, he kicked Pete solidly. The big man roared like an angry lion and turned half-way about the watery log. Shorty kicked out again. His judgment of distance was uncanny in its accuracy. Pete clung silently, desperately to the slippery log.

Once more Shorty kicked. Big Pete's groping fingers slid off the log, his body described a wavering half-circle, and with a hoarse scream of terror he sprawled headforemost into the stream. Shorty uncoiled his rope and waited until a spluttering black face lifted above a spurt of foam thirty feet down-stream; then he replaced the rope and hurried along the shore.

A few minutes later, half-drowned, battered and bruised from head to foot, Big Pete Kadgely crawled out on the sand-spit at the bend in the stream. Shorty arrived soon after. Big Pete was too sick to protest, let alone resist, when his arms were bound securely behind his back and a noose was deftly fastened about his neck.

On the way to town Shorty carried on the bulk of the conversation:

"It's time y'u learned, Pete, not t' be so cocky. Y'u cain't never tell w'en somep'n'll slip. Red-eye's bad stuff, too. It's apt t' make a man feel too darned playful, an'—Them kids o' yourn; you ain't no proper pap to 'em. Doggone, but I sure tanned their or'nary hides. They won't be sittin' down real comfortable-like fer quite a spell."

Shorty chuckled to himself.

But Pete did not seem to hear; he was still in a daze and stumbled on behind, slipping and sliding over the smooth trail.

But the impromptu bath within and without had cleared both his head and his stomach, and the brisk pace enforced by that insistent rope tugging at his windpipe soon effected a complete cure. On the outskirts of the town he finally found voice.

"Y'u—y'u ain't 'restin' me fer good, be y'u, sheriff?"

"Expect as how they ain't no other name fer it."

"But—I ain't never been 'rested before, an'—y'u got the money."

His voice quavered.

Shorty did not reply.

A light shone dimly through a cluster of oak scrub outlining a ramshackle farmhouse.

"That there's Stub Mitchell's place, sheriff."

A pause.

"Me an' him is powerful good friends."

Another pause.

"I'd hate like —— t' have him see me like this."

Still no reply.

"Y'u ain't goin' t' haul me right down through the town this-away, be y'u?"

His wheedling accent switched to startled bewilderment.

For answer Shorty turned off abruptly toward the brightest portion of the town.

At the risk of strangling offhand, Big Pete pulled backward desperately. The tightening rope forbade understandable articulation, but there was no mistaking the mute appeal in the big man's eyes. Shorty loosened the noose.

"I was only jokin', sheriff. I never stole nothin' in my life. The boys'll tell y'u. Lem Halloway'll tell y'u. I figured y'u would understand."

He smiled wanly.

But he found no response in Shorty's mask-like face.

Without a word the little man hauled energetically on the rope.

IT WAS while passing the Casino that it happened. At sight of his friends, some of Big Pete's confidence had returned. A group of rather silent but undoubtedly interested spectators augmented the little procession. Shorty's dirt-encrusted, bedraggled figure limped along in front; he looked to neither the left nor the right. Yet he sensed a subtle air of hostility. The rope, noosed about Big Pete's neck, suddenly went slack. Some one had cut it. Shorty's body tensed.

"Look alive, y'u —— little runt. Here I come."

Without a word, without a single lost motion, Shorty accepted that blatant challenge. He did not attempt to use his guns. It would be suicide. Well he knew. But—with amazing speed he pivoted about, and before the words had well left Big Pete's mouth a freckled fist propelled by one hundred and forty pounds of wiry determination, landed solidly in the tenderest portion of the big man's tender stomach.

Big Pete grunted gustily and doubled up like a rusty wire. That seemingly puny fist met his chin as he sagged forward, right and left in rapid succession. Big Pete swung wildly, weakly. He was gasping for breath. Two more well-timed blows found the pit of his stomach and—Big Pete Kadgely was through.

"Y'u boys got anythin' more up yer sleeves?"

The words came gaspingly—the little man was on the verge of complete exhaustion—but in those mildly inquiring but steadfast blue eyes there was no hint of weakness. The slender brown fingers gently caressed the butts of his guns. They shifted about uneasily. Several on the outskirts of the crowd drifted away. Finally a tall, sunbrowned prospector stepped forward.

"You're there, little man. I'm with y'u. C'mon, boys, give us a hand with Pete's carcass."

Half an hour later, Shorty Wilson eased into Piggy Corcoran's Restaurant. His lean face shone from the strenuous application of soap and water. Half a dozen customers sprawled against the counter. They greeted Shorty jovially, and he knew that these men were now his friends. Corcoran alone remained silent. Shorty carelessly threw the red bandanna handkerchief, with its tinkling contents, down on the counter. Then from his table in a far corner—

"Gimme a cup o' coffee!"

Piggy automatically "drew one." He started to slide it across the counter, then, changing his mind at the last moment, picked it up and conveyed it carefully over to Shorty's table.

"Did y'u hev quite a time with Pete, sheriff?"

Piggy's query was civil enough.

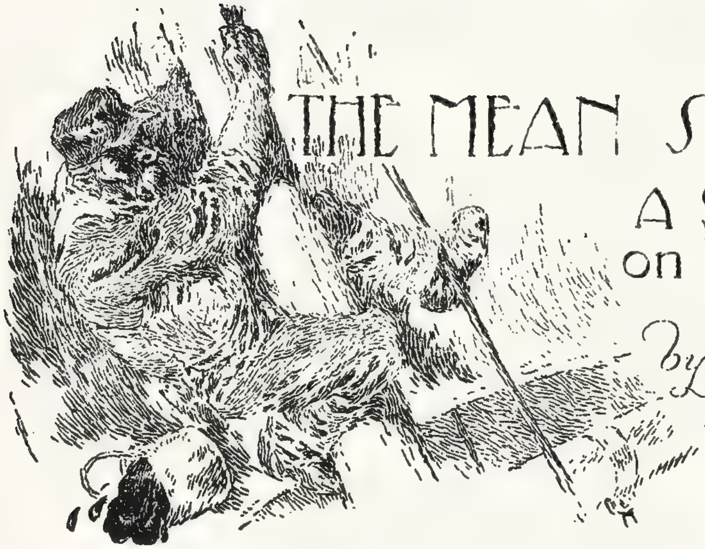
Shorty grinned.

"Oh, so-so. Pete's a playful cuss, like y'u said, Corcoran."

THE MEAN SECOND

A Slant on Life ~

by Bill Adams



Author of "Marea's Fancy Man," "Liverpool to Vancouver," etc.

HAVE you ever done any holystoning? I guess not. I was lying awake this morning early thinking of the gloomy horror of the deck work aboard a windjammer. People who write sea stories are given to omitting the mention of the common grind of daily labor and to going in heavily for the romantic side of sea life. I suppose, as a matter of fact, that it is all more or less romantic; just as every phase of life is so. But, looking back on holystoning, I am compelled to admit that it was dreary work.

What is holystoning?

The decks of the old windjammers were wooden decks, and had to be kept clean. What with the many feet of stevedores aboard in port, and the harbor grime, and cargo grime—coal-dust, cement dust, brick dust and many other dusts—a ship's deck became very dirty while in port; most of the dirt became ingrained. Not only, however, was it to get the dirt off the decks that they were holystoned, but to work away that slippery moss that gathers on the deck planks when for a long period a ship is in bad weather and taking water aboard. Often a deck becomes so slippery that to stand upon it when she rolls at all is well-nigh impossible. Hence the holystoning.

Holystones are large pieces of stone, sandstone, flat on one side at least. The men and boys kneel down in a row and go to work with them upon the planks. They are just large enough to fit the outspread hand, and somewhat heavy. Many and many the weary hour that I have knelt down in a drenching rain, for my full four-hour watch on deck, a holystone in my hand, and have scoured away at the detested planks before me. Smoking while at work is of course not permitted; neither is conversation, unless sometimes by an unusually good-natured mate or second mate—but even then only brief conversation; no long talk-fest.

A little wad of old canvas beneath one's knees saves, or helps to save, one's knees from soreness; for of course, as well as a holystone, each man has a bucket of sea water at his side, wherewith to keep the planks moist that they may scour. Naturally one soon gets wet more or less from the knees down. If it is rainy weather and oilskins are worn it is hard on good oilskins, and their knees give out, or become thin and lose their waterproofness.

On a pleasant day in the trades, when a soft sun shines through fleeced clouds and the seas run blue and bright, it is sadly monotonous work; but under a low, black sky, with a fresh wind whining, the rain coming down steadily, light sprays now and again flicking over the rails—Heaven send

"The Mean Second," copyright, 1924, by Bill Adams.

us a squall so that we may have to get aloft to take off some of her canvas and so find a time of respite from our labors!

What a blessing it was when it came to my turn to go to the wheel for the customary two hours, thereby escaping the deck-scouring! The helmsman was a contented man at the time of holystoning.

The poop-deck, where the "Old Man" keeps himself, is given especial care, and is usually scrubbed with finer stones than are used on the maindeck; stones that crumble raidly and wear out fast. Often instead of using stones on the poop-deck canvas is used, with some fine sand in the bottom of the buckets to take the place of the sandstones.

Heaven help the man or boy who after the poop is finished appeard in those sacred precincts with even the smallest nails in his soles! When finished, the poop-deck is treated to a dressing of warm linseed oil. The quarter-deck is also given linseed oil; but forward of that a mixture of tar and oil is used; the deck, when dressed therewith, appearing slightly tinged with brown. Once the vile work is over, the decks throughout their length oiled, and the holystones forgotten until another voyage, a ship looks lovely.

I almost think that the appearance of the ship when the work was done was compensation for the labor. In fact I am sure of it. That is the way of life throughout. Things seem terrible at the time; but, looked back upon, we get the good of them and forget the bad, the misery that we have been through.

I RECALL a time when my old hooker was beautifully cleaned fore and aft. She glistened in the sunshine. Had the private yacht of one of those millionaire Johnnies come alongside all atwinkle in her paint and polish, she would have been compelled to play second fiddle to the old "*Fast and Furious.*" Moreover we were a ship—not a useless and unseaworthy bauble.

The ship gleamed from her trucks to her deck planks.

The truck is that part of a ship between the extreme head of her rigging and the sky. You will usually see that at the summit of the mast there is a small round ball—very often gilded.

On some ships the truck is but a few inches long. On others it may be seven or eight feet. I have never measured with a foot-rule so can not be accurate; but I have been up there, with a pot of gold paint made fast to my belt, a brush made fast to my wrist, and have gilded the ball. For the mast, below the ball, paint was used. It was somewhat of a job at times, if a ship were rolling fairly heavily, or, still worse, pitching. It called for a certain amount of agility and a steady head.

When first at sea my head was none too steady aloft and I had to live it down—not an easy thing to do. It can be done though. Most men seem to be untroubled aloft by the height above the deck and sea. I became that way; but it was not so at first.

On the occasion of which I speak, when the ship was all polished and shone up ready to enter port, we were bound in to Portland, Oregon, from Europe. A new eye-splice had been worked at the jigger topmast head; the jigger being, as you probably know, the fourth mast on a four-master. That splice had not yet been tarred.

Fore and aft, from rigging screws at the railing right up to the head of her rigging, all her served standing gear had been given a good coat of tar mixed with varnish. She twinkled and shone when the sun struck her. Save for that one eye-splice at the jigger topmast head she was finished, ready to enter port—prepared to show other ships and the lubbers how a ship ought to look.

The second mate, who on that voyage was an ill-natured little rat of a man with sharp dislikes for certain members of his watch and no love for any of us, sent a huge Norwegian sailor named Yohansen aloft one morning as soon as we had finished washing the decks down, to tar the eye-splice. Yohansen stood well over six feet and was of a very clumsy build. His feet and hands and head were all abnormally large. He had the open, bland and honest face of so many of his fellow countrymen, and, though the second mate took special pleasure in endeavoring to make his life miserable, never showed that he bore the officer any ill feeling whatever.

Yohansen started aloft, tar-pot in hand, to tar the eye-splice.

She was lifting high to a long, easy swell on a sea that was almost calm. While Yohansen was at the mast-head she took it into her head to give an unusually heavy pitch, and, lifting her bow high from the crest of a swell, dived far into the next hollow. Yohansen was suddenly confronted with the necessity of either falling himself or letting go of his tar-pot! Think of it!

Beneath him, some hundred feet or so down, lay a deck that had been scoured until the President of this United States and all the rulers of Europe might have been glad to eat from it without a table-cloth.

Beneath him also stood a teakwood chart-house and the taffrail. The two quarter boats, newly given a fine coat of best white zinc paint, were also below him. The bridge-rails were spotless white; the half-round white. Down came the tar-pot, hurtling, turning round and round, while a fine rain of tar spattered the full width of the ship from her boat-skids to her skylight.

I was on the poop at the time, but jumped to the maindeck and vanished, not wishing to be there when the Old Man, now due from his breakfast, should appear on deck.

When the old man appeared, the poop deck was liberally spattered with tar. So were the boats, chart-house, taffrail, half-round and bridge.

That particular Old Man was a past master in the art of expression as practised with the features and without speech. He was also a past master at expressing himself in words. On that morning he was silent. He chose the speechless method and expressed himself with eyebrow and nostril, lip and jaw. I had not got farther than the quarter-deck when he appeared, so stayed there to watch him without being myself seen.

There was no "watch below" that day for any one. All hands were called on deck, and all hands scrubbed paint and woodwork. No one so much as swore at big Yohansen, who worked remorsefully in silence. The Old Man, having asked who was responsible for the mess, relapsed into silence.

The second mate, Rat Features, passed amongst us with scowling face; while the mate, a man somewhat like his inferior, though of a quite different appearance, sniggered to himself secretly; not beyond enjoying to some extent the second mate's discomfiture.

Neither Old Man nor mate reprimanded Yohansen. No man or boy said a word to him to make him feel disgrace. A younger, nimbler sailor, one of the apprentices, was sent aloft to tar the fatal eye-splice.

From Old Man to youngest apprentice every one aboard her was silent when the ratty second passed him by. Every one knew that it was his mean spirit, his love for the discomfiture of any better man than himself, that was responsible for the day's unnecessary labor.

The Old Man expressed his feelings with his nostrils and his eyes. The sailors ignored the second as though he were a nonentity amongst them and carried out his orders in absolute silence with no "Aye, aye, sir;" but not so much as a frown on their faces. We in the half-deck jested among ourselves in tones just so audible that he might guess of what we jested. We befriended the big Yohansen, joking with him over his mishap, until his big, honest eyes shone with pleasure.

I'm sorry for a mean-spirited man with a ratty face. He always gets found out sooner or later and finds himself devoid of friends; while the big, flat-footed, clumsy, honest-eyed fellow will ever be feeling a pat on the back just when he needs and least looks for it. Don't you think so?

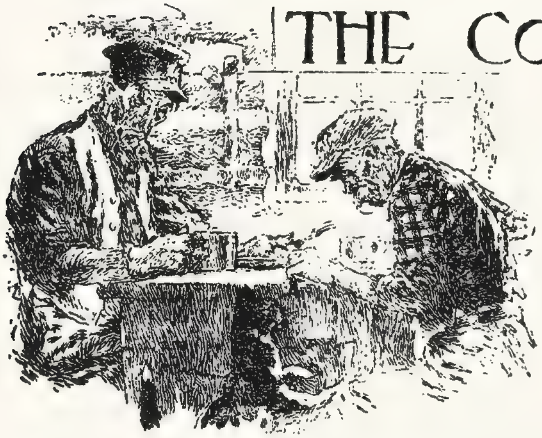
It was not, I think, after all, the ships that made life at sea so filled with a strange romanticism; less that than the close acquaintanceship that always existed amongst the men who sailed together. We fought often, and swore freely. Some of us drank, and gave the devil a dance in full measure—yet all had something to live for that was well worth while.

Those who were different, such as was that second mate, those who followed the sea and yet got nothing of the lesson that her ships taught, those who forgot their souls and let their manhood sink, letting trivial dislikes and petty jealousies rise uppermost, were not of us. They were very few. They were those who at times of disaster were lacking—those who were ready to leave a sinking ship while there was yet hope of saving her. May old Nick be left to holystone their souls till they come clean again! It will be a weary hard job for Nicky, I'm thinking.

THERE was sunshine at sea, and there were shadow-filled skies. There were hard days, and days of ease. There was wind, and there was calm. I can see so many pleasant dawns and moonrises that I often wish that I were back again, despite the weariness of our long round of labor. There was always the voyage's ending to look forward to—always some unknown port before us in which we would some day wander happily.

It is still so. We shall some day find what port it is whither we are voyaging, and then forget the round of toil that seems at times to vanquish us today. Better have been a sea-worthy old merchant ship than a useless bauble when we come through those last wide headlands and heave her to her moorings with a song.

The sea and her ships are but one phase of man's life, which, wherever you see it, is filled brimful with a strange romanticism that we can not understand.



THE COMMON GRIEF

by Negley Farson

Author of "The Man-Killer," "Jones, Thompson and ——," etc.

"YO!"

It was a huge man that blocked the door of the cabin, a sinister, hatchet-faced man—and he roared like a bull.

"Yo! Oh—Yo!"

He cocked his head, listening intently. He bellowed through his cupped hands. Then his voice changed, a croaking attempt at seductive wheedling.

"Oh—Yo! Here—Yo! Here—Yo!"

Silence. The green wall of forest as mute as a canvas, and then, from the cabin behind him, a gratified chuckle lost in the clatter of dishes. At this the face of the man became savage, his eyes closed to slits. He strode into the clearing, clenched his fists. Then he cursed. Not the conventional oaths of the city, but the wild, unfettered blasphemy of the open places, of a mind that has known no restraint. A sulfurous scourge.

It was answered. A shadow, a fantom slipped through the lush undergrowth; a patter of dew, and a magnificent cat stepped from out the salal.

"You!" the giant pointed accusingly. "You yust show up here for chuck!"

Unperturbed, the cat strode through the great arch of his legs and into the cabin.

It was a small cabin, smooth-logged, roofed with moss-green cedar-shakes, a bunk, covered with red Hudson Bay blankets, in either far corner. Guns hung from deer-prongs on the walls, checked mackinaws, axes and great cross-cut saws. Clothing. There was the impression of a very deft and economical utilization of space.

The stove stood by the door, and here the cat paused, sniffed appraisingly and then satisfied that bacon was coming and all was well with the world, strolled over underneath the table to wash up for breakfast. Tail, flanks and cheeks were licked over carefully; a few dabs of a moist paw over forehead and ears, and its toilet was finished. It then settled down for a calm, philosophical inspection of the man handling the frying-pan.

This was a wee little man, red-headed, red-faced and with a drooping red walrus mustache. He looked sad.

"Aye," he grunted without taking his eyes from the eggs, "an' how many birdies did ye murrder this morning?"

He ladled the last few spoonfuls of hot fat over the fast whitening yolks and then, with a series of revolving half-turns, transferred all that there was on the top of the stove to the table. He then divided the eggs, bacon and potatoes into two exact equal portions —and thumped a tin plate.

The two men sat down to eat. Neither spoke. A listener there would have heard nothing but the munching of jaws, scraping of knives and an occasional booming of grouse from the thickets surrounding the cabin. It was an ominous silence. The eyes of each man seemed to be avoiding the other. Only once did they meet; and then the two men froze stiff as statues. The eyes alone seemed alive, livid with hate. A vicious stare—hot as a jump-spark.

And the cat, as if affected by some electric discharge, mewed uncomfortably.

The big man looked down.

"Yo," he said, addressing the cat, "I'm goin' across to No. 3 sometime this mornin' —anyting dat we want?"

The little man cleared his throat, selected a choice bit of bacon rind from the pile on his plate, and held it down for the cat; and as that animal advanced, withdrew the dainty tid-bit until the cat stood up with its paws on his knees to secure it. Then, rubbing the back of its ears, the little man spoke:

"Joey, we've run oot o' sugar. We'll need aboot fourr pun. A tin o' Klim—and twa dozen eggs. The eggs shouldna be ower fifty-five cents——"

"CHAMPAGNE" SHANNON, cookee of No. 3, was telling the Lidgerwood salesman about it.

"They's been partners for over ten years. Regular Siamese Twins. I've seen 'em at camps all over the Coast. Buckers and fallers—an' right good ones, too! If any one'd told me that "Shorty" Archibald and Swanson would ever fall out—I'd a called him a liar!"

"Well, they was matey enough when they came here," interrupted the "push," "the big 'un offered to kick off my face because I was kidding his pal. The little man was grousing over our prices—he's a Scotchman, y'know."

"Aye," murmured Champagne, "they was closer than sweethearts. But that was last Winter—when they first come. They used to drop over at first, paddle across from the island, to pass the time o' day as it were. But then they sort o' dropped off. Only come over when they wanted supplies. Toward the last I noticed they didn't ever speak to each other. Just come across, bought their stuff an' pushed off. No conversation. Before the snow came they stocked up for the Winter—an' we never set eyes on 'em again until about two weeks ago."

"I used to watch," said the push. "You can see their cabin from here. I used to watch for the smoke every morning. Thar she was—so I knew they weren't dead."

The Lidgerwood man looked across the strip of blue water to the much discussed island. The cabin was lost in the great stand of fir; but the blue ribbon of smoke stood out quite distinctly.

"Must have been lonely, out there in the Winter."

"That's just the trouble," Champagne explained; "them two men was bored—an' that'll make any one fight."

"Human nature," he sadly admitted, "is a long ways from perfect. There ain't no two natures that ain't got some rough spots. An' when you take two of 'em, and squeeze 'em together—and rub 'em together—why, they begin to set up imflammation. When Shorty and Swanson was working down in the camps there was a lot of other humans around, and they could sort of ease themselves, cussin' to them. But out there it's diff'rent—they got to take it out on each other."

The push nodded—

"Same as marriage."

"Eg-zackly! That's why it don't work. People see too much of each other. They ain't got no safety valve. I tell yer——"

Champagne held up a finger:

"There's lots of trials that we meet in this life. Yes sir. There's the trial of adversity, *an'* the trial by fire, and there's that one by combat—to show whether you got a yellow streak in a scrap—and all of 'em's tough. But all of 'em is a cinch compared to the trial by boredom. That un's a brute!

"Why there's many a married man that welcomes a fight, a real stand-up-and-knock-down—even if he does get the worst of it—just for excitement. Sort of wakens him up, so it does. And I tell you that them two out there on the island is ready to cut each other up!"

"Do you know," Champagne pointed a finger in the Lidgerwood face, "that for the last month them two has been doing all their conversin' via the cat!"

"The cat!"

"Yes sir! They won't speak to each other. So when they got any idea that they want to get across, they make out they is telling the tale to the cat! When the cat ain't there they can't talk."

"Well," smiled the Lidgerwood man, lighting a dollar cigar, "it would be —— funny if some one walked off with that cat."

IT WAS Spring then on Valdez, the flush Spring of the North. Warm sun, like wine, and blue water; the silhouette of mountains on the mainland had changed from flat, metallic steel blue-and-white to a plush, smoky depth of green shadows. The ice-lock of Winter had broken; everything seemed alive. Strange sounds of life in the woods, rustlings at nights——

Joe, enjoying the moonlight, strolling aimlessly about in the clearing before the small cabin, suddenly came to attention. Somewhere—somewhere out in that vast pile of shadows——?

There was a faint stir in the brush; and Joe, stomach close to the ground, giving little guttural growls, slid into the shadows——

FOR five days neither Shorty nor Swanson had done one spot of work. For five days they had searched every conceivable niche in the mile long sweep of the island. For five days they had passed and repassed each other in silence. And now, as if by some tacit agreement, they met at their canoe on the water-front.

Shorty, as was his custom, took the bow seat. Swanson, shoving clear, stepped in astern. With short, furious strokes they drove the craft toward the mainland.

Something in the unusual speed of their travel brought those members of No. 3, not at work in the woods, out on the dock of the cook-house to meet them.

"Funny!" declared Champagne himself. "Never saw any one but a greenhorn paddle excited like that!"

"Mebbe they's upset about something?" suggested the timekeeper.

Without delaying to make fast the canoe, both of its occupants leaped to the dock. Swanson strode over and tapped the push on the chest.

"Gimme that cat!"

The push, startled, stepped back a pace.

"I ain't seen your cat!"

"Gimme that cat!"

By now Champagne had started to saunter casually off toward the door leading into the galley. Archibald headed him off—the flame of fight in his eyes.

"Looka here!" Champagne asserted his dignity, "you move aside. I gotta get dinner."

Without a word Archibald thrust out a hand, seized the thick shirt of Champagne where his stomach was roundest, and jerked him in through the door. Inside, he shoved the astonished cookee down on a bench.

"Mon," he rasped through his teeth, "if ye dinna be nippy I'll break yourr great face!"

Champagne, unable to speak, breathed hard through his mouth.

The Scot seized a fork from the table, and jabbed it into the unsuspecting leg of the cook.

"Come now—will *that* larn ye?"

With a forlorn howl Champagne broke clear and fled.

From the dock came the sounds of great battle—thudding blows—curses—grunts—and then a roar of pain from the push—

"Leave off—yuh—yuh——"

Bang!

In a mad charge the Swede had hurled his enemy against the side of the cook-house; he held him there, butting the bloody face with his head.

The push gave a sharp upward thrust with his knee; and Swanson sank to the boards with a groan.

The push then stepped back, cleared the blood from his eyes, and with great deliberation kicked the prostrate Swanson full in the face.

Knowing them as he did, it was foolish of him not to ascertain the whereabouts of Archibald. It was a strategic *faux pas*. He realised it the instant his feet shot from under him; but the descending boot of the Scot put a stop to his thoughts.

Archibald, left alone on the red field of battle, saw his doom rush upon him. A dozen loggers raced down the string-piece. With a "Scots wha h'ae!" he charged into their midst.

It was the tug captain who suggested marooning them on their own island. He said—

"We'll keep their canoe."

So with due ceremony Shorty and Swanson were thrown over from the bow of the tug.

"Now," jeered the tug master from the prow of his craft, "you can stay there till you learn better manners—and build a new skiff!"

In silence Shorty and Swanson stood knee deep in water and watched the tug pull away. In silence they turned about and walked up the hill to their cabin. And in silence they bound up their wounds.

TWO weeks later, the tug captain dropped into the cook-house for some Java.

"How're you feelin', Champagne?"

The cook announced that he was feeling quite well.

"Say, they sure did smear up the face of the push!"

Champagne made it plain that this was his busy morning indeed. A flunky who chanced to come in was driven forth on an errand.

The tug captain declared that the Java was fine; could he have one more cup?

"How's your bum leg?" asked the unwelcome visitor.

Champagne growled.

"Say, Champagne, what did you do with that cat?"

This was too much. Champagne moaned and picked up a fish knife.

"Look here! Cap'n Buckley, I've heard all about that cat that I'm goin' to. I tell yuh I *ain't seen that cat!*"

"I know you ain't," the tug captain grinned over his cup, "cause I just seen it myself!"

"You—*what!*"

"Yes, sir!"

"Where?"

Buckley waited to get the full force of the blow—

"Oh, over there on the island."

"You're kiddin'?"

"I ain't. True as a fact; sitting right here on this lap not an hour ago."

Champagne sat down.

"Do you mean to say that that cat's been there all the time? After all they come here an' done?"

The tug captain chuckled:

"Yes, sir; I went over this morning to pick up a boom. Thinks I, 'I might as well drop up and have a look at those fellers; they ain't got no grudge against *me*.' And there—" the tug captain waved a great paw—"an' there they was all. Swanson, Shorty, *and* the cat—having brekfus!

" 'My,' says Archibald getting up, 'if it ain't ole Cap'n Buckley!'

"An' Swanson says—

" 'Sit down, cap'n, an' have something to drink.'

" 'My,' I says, 'you all seem pretty friendly. What's come over you boys?'

"And then, Champagne, you oughta seen them two fellers grin!

" 'Show 'im!' says Swanson.

"And Archibald took me off to a corner. And what do you think that I see?—*four little kittens!*"

Champagne collapsed—

"*Kittens!*"

"Yes, sur, born in the woods. That's why she went off."

Champagne pounded the table:

"Now I know that you're lying. It weren't that kind of a cat. You *know* that cat's name was Joe!"

"Yes," said the skipper of the *Thomas H. Pike*, "but it must a been a mistake. Cause the last thing I heard Swanson say—just as I was leaving the cabin—was—

" 'Come here, Yosephine, an' finish your brekfus.' "

A MORNING CALL

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by Leonard H. Nason

Author of "A Tragedy of Errors," "Three Lights From a Match," etc.

LATE afternoon in June, very late, so late that the sun had already gone behind the western hills. Behind those hills was St. Mihiel, to the east was Seichprey, and directly in front was a wrinkly field, through which flowed a tiny creek called the Rupt du Mad. Then there was another field and a ridge along which the German trenches ran. Beyond the ridge one could see nothing, save only that great lump of earth called Mont Sec, that overlooked all that countryside, as a watch-dog views a back yard.

From the Xivray-Rambucourt Road on the right, to Bouconville on the left, a ditch ran directly across the field. This ditch was called by courtesy a trench, but it was a common ditch just the same. It had no fire-step, no dugouts worthy of the name, no revetments, no traverses. It was just a ditch, except that the bottom of it was paved with duck-boards, very clattery and narrow.

Just as twilight and the approach of night signifies rest to the worker of peace, so does it signify toil to the worker of war. It was a little early yet for much activity, but machine guns were being manned, men were waking up and coming out of the cellars in all the little towns, and the artillery were preparing to fire the nightly quota of shells. A 77 whistled its cheerful way overhead and burst in a clump of trees that was quite remote from everything. The Germans shelled those trees purposely, for the shelling of unoccupied woods begets no hard feelings and leads to no reprisals. A shell swished from the American side to the Germans, and burst, clanging faintly, in a communication trench that *was* occupied. One almost expected the Germans to arise, as men sometimes do during a class fight at college, and cry—

"Aw, quit your sluggin'!"

The supper of an entire company, waiting in that German trench to move up to the front line as soon as darkness fell, was quite spoiled.

A dirty trick on the part of the Americans. This particular part of the line was supposed to be a rest sector, a place for eating and sleeping, where the lion lay down with the lamb, and where congenial officers of both armies were said to arrange hunting-parties and go out together for a day's sport. Now the Americans had taken over the sector and spoiled it all.

In the ditch that was called a trench, thirteen men crawled from their blankets and prepared to go through the motions of stand-to. These men were the entire garrison of this trench. Two machine-gun crews and a sergeant. During the day they kept their guns in a hole, covered with netting to which were tied wisps of grass, but after dark they set them up, left two men to watch for visitors, and went to sleep again.

One of the members of the garrison crawled over the rear wall of the trench and walked across the field in back of it. It was almost dark now, and he had little fear of being seen from the enemy lines, or of being

---

"A Morning Call," copyright, 1924, by Leonard H. Nason.

shot at if he was seen. He was out there to do some shooting of his own and he kept looking off toward Loupmont, where there were some woods, with a speculative eye. This man was huge and ungainly, his sleeves ended half-way up his forearm, and his blouse half-way up his back. The tail of his shirt fluttered in the air, for it was a salvaged shirt and too short, so that every time he bent over the tail came out, and he had grown weary of tucking it in again. Six feet high this man had grown, and then had bent over and started to grow down again. Perhaps years of bending over a plow or sitting hunched on mowing-machine and horse-tedder had bowed him, and no amount of setting-up exercises could straighten him or take that ham off his back.

This man's last name was Perrin, and his first was not known. They called him "Goop." He had a long curving jaw like a brush hook, or a sickle, or like the man in the moon, and a mouth that was always open. Still, Goop Perrin was a good guy. He kept the garrison of the trench laughing, and his captain would have been lost without him. Happy the officer who has some one under his command that can make the men laugh.

Goop was very solemn at the present moment, though. He sat down behind a bush and peered through it at the distant woods. Then he softly opened the breech of his rifle—he had "borrowed" it a few days before—and made sure that there was a shell in the chamber. Then he waited, blinking. Things came out of those woods in the dusky twilight, and he meant to get one of them. Goop waited, licking his lips, and wishing he had a chew. He strained his eyes toward the woods again.

Why did this man sit behind his bush, waiting and watching, clutching his rifle and thirsting for blood? For what was he waiting? Ah, he sat behind that bush for his own amusement, and he waited patiently for a black shadow to flit from blacker trees and hoot mournfully. Goop was shooting owls, but with no degree of success. The owls were very hard to see and harder to hit. Nevertheless Goop waited patiently, rubbing the stock of his rifle and hoping that the darkness would hold off a little while longer. He had heard from the French that owls made a very delectable stew and he wanted to see if it were true.

Ah! There was one! The rifle flew up and the muzzle followed the owl's curving flight, up, down, around. *Bang!*

"Aw, punkin seed," muttered Goop. "I missed that one by erbout a mile."

It might be well to mention here that Goop came from the head-waters of the Dog River, a hustling stream that flows from the roof of the Green Mountains of Vermont by way of Cow Run, Ram Corners and the Winooski Valley into Lake Champlain. To his retired environment was due his simplicity of soul.

The western half of the so-called trench below Goop was garrisoned by a company of infantry, due to the nearness of the woods referred to above. A raiding-party, concealed by the woods, could approach very close to the American trench, whereas the more eastern half of the trench was protected by a long stretch of open ground, and any force attacking it would have the town on its left flank, from whence a force could sally out and cut off the attackers.

On this particular June evening the infantry was due for relief, and the major of the relieving troops was making a reconnaissance of the position, accompanied by his staff. They were cautiously moving along the trench, for they were but lately arrived in the sector, and they did not yearn to be the recipients of hardware. The major was nervous. When he raised a cautious head over the parapet, he could see lights gleaming high among the black trees, like street lights turned on at the approach of dusk. Those pale, gleaming lights were star-shells, held in air by a parachute arrangement and fired by the Germans to illuminate the ground in front of their lines. Another shell whined across the sky and whooped itself into fragments about two hundred yards away. The staff ducked.

"Close one, that," muttered the major.

"I didn't know they were so lively up here. I understood this is a quiet sector," spoke up one of the officers.

"Quiet enough when the French had it," answered the major. "The Boche would shell one empty field and the French would shell another. Gentlemen's agreement. French and Jerry officers went hunting together. Fact. Ask the lieutenant."

"I have heard it said,"smiled the French liaison officer, "but it is not so. On the Chemin des Dames, yes, but here, no."

"We jazzed it up, though," continued the major. "Shell —— out of 'em day and night. Let 'em know there's a war on. Play marbles for keeps, this division does."

The French officer smiled again, a little sadly.

"Some night they will pay you a call and it will not be so *chic.*"

"Bring 'em on," said the major. "Bring 'em on. Give us a chance to do some bayonet stuff."

He hauled a bulky map-case around to the front of him and began to consult a map in it.

"Let's see, where are we at? That town over there's Xivray. That pond is Vargevaux Pond, and that brook is the Rupt du Mad."

He pointed at the trench wall in a different direction after naming each place and one of the officers clambered up on the parapet to see if the direction the major indicated was correct.

"Hey! hey!" cried all with one voice.

"Get down!" roared the major. "Get down! You'll draw fire! Get down! Where do you think you are? Revere Beach?"

The sightseeing officer got down.

At about the time that the curious officer climbed upon the parapet an owl took his spiral floating way toward where Goop waited behind his bush. Up went Goop's rifle, he drew a bead, the owl swooped almost down to the ground and the rifle followed, as a trap shooter follows a pigeon. *Bang!*

"Gorram it! I missed the durn thing again!"

Now that owl had swooped in the direction of the trench in which the major and his party were. Goop's bullet slid into the front wall of that trench, about half an inch from the ear of a very earnest young lieutenant that sat there.

"*Whit!*" said the bullet. The staff all heard the crack of the rifle. They all heard the bullet strike, but none could tell from which direction it had come, nor where it had hit, even the man whose ear it had missed.

"We're under observation!" cried some one. They stared at each other with wide eyes. The French officer pointed silently to a great lump of a hill, a hill as commanding as a plug hat in the center of a table.

"Mont Sec," he said briefly. "They see you from there."

Mont Sec was three miles away, but how a rifle crack would carry that far did no bother any of them.

"You've given away the position," whispered the major in fearful tones to the man who had climbed upon the parapet. "We will all be killed."

He looked about him at the strained faces and the hurrying tongues that moistened dry lips.

"I've seen enough," said he. "Let's go back."

They went, hurrying as fast as they could without actually running. The major led them and they had no fear of stepping on his heels.

"What's in the rest of this trench?" asked the major of a sentry they passed.

"Nuthin'," said the sentry. "It ain't occupied beyond our sector."

"I must see that a barricade is built," muttered the major, "as soon as my men come up. Oh, Mr. Garland!"

"Sir?" answered one of the staff.

"See that I have a machine gun to cover the door of my post of command. I mustn't take any chances."

"Yessir."

The staff then continued their hurrying way.

Back on the hillside Goop reluctantly stood up. It was almost dark now and he must be going.

"Gorram it," said he, "seems like I never will git one uv them owls, but I'll keep a-tryin'."

He walked down the hill and dropped into the trench, where he found his comrades profanely awaiting him.

"Where you been?" they cried. "It's time we had our supper and you off goldbrickin' somewheres. Git a move on, now!"

"I dassent go up there before stand-to is over," said Goop. "Ef I wuz to run inter some officer he'd skin me alive."

This was an unanswerable argument, but the members of the garrison continued to grumble notwithstanding.

"What was you doin' up there, bangin' away like Fourth of July?" asked one.

"I wuz shootin' owls," said Goop.

"What's the idea of shootin' inoffensive owls?" asked the sergeant in command of the trench.

"I got a grudge ag'in 'em," answered Goop.

"What for?"

"They stole one o' my old man's prize double-barrel Baldwin apple-trees thet he won fust prize with ter the White River Fair."

No one spoke, for they knew that Goop was about to recount and Goop had a more than local reputation as a recounter.

"It wuz this way," began Goop. "There wuz a old owl used to come an' hoot in our orchard every night and keep the hull family awake to all hours. He come down outta the pines on Shaw Mountain and he'd hoot and holler fit to bust. Well, after a while he begun to bring his relations along with him and they'd set around and eat my old man's apples, and hoot and screech, and talk about their neighbors till you couldn't hear yerself think. So my old man, he got some tar to Randolph, where they wuz fixin' the road, and fixed that tree up in good style with lots uv tar. Then he set up in the kitchen with his shotgun, waitin' fer the owls.

"Well, the owls come down and sot in that tar and got good an' stuck in it, and they screeched till you could hear 'em clean over to Montpelier an' all the owls in that part uv the woods come to see what the matter uv the other owls wuz and to give advice. 'N they all got stuck in the tar. My old man, he set in the kitchen waitin' and waitin', till he was sure all the owls was come outta the woods, but he kept hearin' more comin' so he set there 'til nigh on to midnight, and then he couldn't wait no longer, so he picks up the shotgun an' a lantern an' goes out."

"Then what?" asked the sergeant, after a long pause.

"Why," said Goop, "the owls seen my old man comin' an' they give one almighty screech an' begun flappin' their wings an' the blast was so strong that it blowed out my old man's lantern and blowed him over."

"But how'd they steal the tree?"

"Well, they all flapped their wings and tried to fly, but they was stuck fast in the tar and couldn't, but they flapped and flapped and purty soon, there wuz so many uv 'em, an' they wuz so strong, they just pulled up the tree by the ruts and flew away with it."

There was a horrified silence. Goop calmly adjusted the sling of his rifle, slung it over one shoulder, gathered the kitchen utensils left from the previous meal and departed down the trench, going in the direction of the town. Goop had stolen this rifle and he kept it by him all the time, lest it be stolen again. Machine gunners are not issued rifles.

Thirteen men held the eastern half of the trench, two gun-crews and a sergeant. During the day the guns were kept in a hole, covered with chicken wire to which were tied bunches of grass. Two men stood guard by each gun. At stand-to, which was for an hour at twilight, the guns were set up and the members of the garrison were supposed to be awake and on the alert. They usually stood around and cursed, or sat on ration boxes or walked up and down the duckboards. Really, they should have formed about the guns, gunner, loader, second loader, and the three extra men, ready to pass ammunition and assist in correcting jams and stoppages. Such procedure, however, they considered useless and the sergeant believed that twelve men on the parapet would give away the gun position, which they would have undoubtedly done, but that four were not so easily seen.

Of course it would have been dark when they were up there, but a star-shell fired by an unskilled hand often lights up the trench it is fired from with terrible clearness. It must be remembered that the German observatories on Mont Sec looked directly into all these trenches. To the left of the machine guns, the trench was vacant, and the gunners knew nothing about it save that the infantry's sector ended at an outpost a thousand yards west of the guns.

Goop had just faded into the night and the sound of his feet on the duckboards was still plainly audible, when a sound of singing came to the machine gunners. It was low singing, but quite audible, for the wall of the trench carried the sound like a huge megaphone.

"If I hev a daughter I'll dress her up in green,
'N send her down ter Quantico ter be a Jawn Marine.
But if I hev a son, sir, he'll wear the navy blue,
'N yell, 'Ter hell with the army,' like his daddy use ter do.

"Home, boys, home, it's home we ought ter be,
Home, boys, home, in the land uv liberty.
We'll nail Ol' Glory ter the top uv the pole,
'N we'll all be there ter answer when the sergeant calls the roll."

Came the voice of Goop sternly:

"Cut out thet singin'. Where do you think you are, to home?"

The singing stopped.

"Who permoted you?" asked another voice.

"None o' yer business. You cut out thet singin'."

"You git out the way an' let me pass!"

"I ain't goin' to git out in the mud fer any East Pownal bug chawer!"

"I'm carryin' the United States mail!"

"Goop's snarled up with the mail orderly again," said the sergeant. "Let's go down and separate them before they dump our mail in the mud."

The unoccupied members of the garrison hastened along the trench and there beheld the shadowy figure of Goop, facing another man.

"I don't care if you be," said Goop, unaware of the new arrivals. "You git out the way fer *me!*"

"I wouldn't give way fer no prize hog like you be."

"You hain't brains enough to put a ox yoke on a pole!"

The two paused, breathless.

"Take a poke at him, go on," urged one of the gunners.

Both contestants suddenly became aware of the onlookers, and loath as they both seemed to be to physical encounter, there was nothing to do but to resort to it.

"Hey," cried the sergeant. "Lay off until we get the mail. He'll get our letters all mud!"

But one of the gunners had sneaked up behind Goop and given him a shove. Goop swung mightily as he felt himself pushed toward the other man and the mail orderly, seeing Goop bearing down upon him, swung likewise.

Sock! Sock! Not the sound, though, of knuckles rebounding from jaw-bones, but the sound of bodies sitting heavily in mud. Both Goop and the mail orderly, shunning trial by battle, had pulled their swings and the impetus of their tremendous blows had upset them into the mud.

"Gol durn you," said Goop, shaking his fist. "I'll pound the cider out uv you one uv these days!"

"You ain't able ter pound the cider out uv a bedbug," retorted the mail orderly from the other side of the duck board.

"Get up," said the sergeant, "and make tracks for that supper."

Goop arose and departed, breathing defiance, and making no attempt to remove the mud that plastered him. His comrades jeered. The mail orderly likewise clambered back on the duckboards.

"If my foot hedn't slipped," said he, "I'd hev plastered thet numskull flatter'n a pancake."

The gunners jeered again.

"Give us our mail," said the sergeant, "and beat it before we get shelled. They shell —— out of us every night about this time. They'll shell —— out of us now, sure, after all that chewin' the rag."

The mail orderly hastily handed over a bundle of letters and then fled back along the duckboards, where the sound of his running feet sounded like machine-gun fire. He proceeded some hundred yards, when he came to steps cut in the front wall of the trench and these he mounted, ducked over the parapet, and through a lane in the wire. He was not in sight of the enemy lines, and by following one of the little hollows in the ground, he could get safely to the road, and into the town, thus saving a mile or so in distance, and reaching the town long before the heavily-laden Goop. This short cut was not known to Goop, and he would not have dared take it if he had known of it, for it was through a section of No Man's Land, and Goop's knowledge of where the German trenches were was not as good as the mail orderly's.

"Come on down the dugout," said the sergeant, "Where we can strike a light and see who scored on the mail. You'd think the two biggest hicks in the outfit would stick by each other and not be scrapping all the time."

"They aren't scrapping," said one. "They just chew the rag. You couldn't make either one fight if you tried. I think they hate each other because they're so much alike."

"I wish Goop would get up nerve enough to lick that mail orderly," said another. "He sure is worthless. Creepin' up here after dark with mail he had since this mornin'."

"Huh!" said the sergeant. "Remember the time the shell fell in the trench down near the road? We didn't get any mail for two days after that. If he was any good they'd have him on a gun. He hasn't got guts enough to be a K. P. The Old Man won't send him out, because that's just what he wants to have happen to him. As long as they keep him up here, he suffers."

"And every time him and Goop meet, they have a big argument, but never do anything about it. They're like lots of fellers. One is scared to fight, and the other one dassn't."

GOOP went on out to the road and then took his way down-hill into the town. Night had fallen, now, and it bid fair to be black and starless. Goop fell into a shell-hole full of water and scrambling out of it, fell into another, his cans clattering tremendously.

"Goramity!" he exclaimed.

The kitchen to which Goop took his way was in one of the houses of the town. The rear wall of a house had been removed by a shell and it was possible for the rolling-kitchen to drive right into the living-room. The roof of the house was rather frayed, but still very able to keep rain from the cooks and out of the slum, and moreover a fire could be built before daybreak and kept going after dark, without fear of being spotted from either Mont Sec or by an enemy airman.

When Goop stumbled in over the junks of broken tiling and shattered plaster, he found two men waiting, hands in pockets, and mess gear on floor. A candle, fixed to the top of the mess sergeant's helmet, enabled the cook to see where to put the slum when he poured it into the cans the men carried. By this candle a man could dimly see his neighbor's face, but that was all. The rest of the body was in darkness. A man might think he was in hell indeed. White faces floated here and there, like lost souls, gigantic shadows wavered and tossed on the walls and the cook, mounting upon a bench, bathed in the red light from the interior of the stove lid. With a wailing cry a soul hurtled down from distant stars, landing with a crash of iron against the gates. The demon that floated above the rest, bathed in flames, gave ear.

"They're comin' early tonight," he remarked, "but they don't bother this end o' the town to amount to anything. That slum'll be done in two shakes of a lamb's tail, and then you fellers git. Too many men standin' around's liable to break down the floor."

"That you, Goop?" asked a voice in the gloom.

"Yep," said Goop. "Got any makin's?"

The other man had and produced them. It takes practise to roll a cigaret in the dark, but these men had had lots of practise like that.

"How's things to your way?" asked the other man, when the cigarets were going. "The mail orderly was tellin' us he knocked you fer a loop a little while ago."

"'Tain't so," replied Goop. "I made a pass at him and he fell offen the duck-boards with the wind of it. How's things to yourn?"

"I can't complain. I wish we'd hev suthin' to eat besides bacon. I hain't set my teeth into nawthin' but bacon fer a month or more."

More men came in, rattling their tinware. Cigarets began to glow. They could smoke, under cover as they were, and they wished to make the best of their opportunity. There would be no smoking in the trenches until daylight.

"There's a man in my section growin' bristles," remarked Goop's friend.

"What's the reason o' that?" asked Goop.

"Why he et so much bacon an' slept so much in the mud, all shoved up with three er four more fellars, and hed to eat out the same dish with half a dozen and fight fer his food so, thet he thought he might's well be a regular hog, so he set in growin' bristles down his back."

Cans began to rattle and there was a pouring, slopping sound from the direction of the flaring candle. Feet shuffled on the débris on the floor.

"That so?" said Goop, drawing a deep breath. "I can beat that. There's a fellar in my section goes down ter that pond and swims all day long an' his skin is gettin' all scaly, cause he's et so much goldfish."

"It hain't so," said the other man, "fer I wuz down to that pond today and didn't see a soul."

"Well, if you ain't a dumb fool!" said Goop with great disgust. "He swims under water, o' course. 'Jever see a fish swimmin' on top of the water?"

Goop's friend gasped, then he drew out his tobacco and rolled another cigaret, while his inventive powers worked rapidly.

"Goop," he cried suddenly, throwing away the third attempt at a cigaret. "Did I ever tell you erbout the man in my section thet's the biggest liar in the A. E. F.?"

"No," said Goop in a puzzled manner. "You never did."

"Well, he suttinly is the biggest liar I ever did see. Why, this here fellar had the nerve to tell us that he could tell a bigger lie than Goop Perrin ever thought uv."

"You're crazier'n ——," said Goop calmly. He stooped and picked up his cans.

"What say, cook, chow ready yet?"

There was an exclamation of surprize from the darkness behind the stove.

"You after chow?" cried a voice. "I thought you was just visitin'. Why there ain't a bit left. I issued it all out."

"Great Jehosaphat'n his fifty wives, don't say that!" cried Goop. "They'll murder me. There's another man here ain't got none either."

"I ain't no chow carrier," spoke up the other man. "I'm a K. P."

The mess sergeant and the cook began to explore the pans with the candle end for light.

"How many you got over there?" they asked Goop. "Thirteen? You poor boob, why dontchuh get off your foot once in a while? Stand there chewin' the fat and let the chow get all issued out! I hope they hang yuh."

The cook dragged out the empty pans from the corner where he had piled them for the K. P. to wash and proceeded to scrape them with a huge spoon. There was quite a little slum in the lower corner of each one, for he had stacked them on a slant and the grease had drained down. He put these drainings into a single pan and regarded it ruefully.

" 'Tain't enough," he decided.

He returned the candle to its former place, sticking it down carefully, and disappeared in the shadows. In a little while there was a sound of pouring water, then the whack of a cleaver opening cans. The slum was being stretched by the addition of water and corned willie.

"Come up here, Goop," called the cook finally, "an' if there's any holler about bum food, I'll tell 'em how come, so you better see that they don't crab."

Laden with slum and canteens full of coffee, Goop took his homeward way, concocting an alibi while he walked. Goop spent most of his time thinking up excuses for something or other. A shell grunted over in the field to his left.

"Maybe one o' them'll fall on that mail orderly," thought Goop. "I hope so."

Goop's shoe scraped on a stone, the stone gave way, and Goop's foot went into a water-filled shell-hole. Goop, struggling to keep his balance, fell sidewise, there was a crash of tinware and a tremendous splash. Goop had fallen into the twin shell-holes again and had sat down in the larger of the two, in water up to his chest.

"My stars," thought Goop, "the slum!"

With that he arose, dripping, but the covers on the cans were still in place. Having assured himself of this fact, Goop proceeded once more. He could see the German star-shells from where he was on the road, and the loom of Mont Sec, but all the rest was deep blackness. In a short time he came to where the trench turned off from the road and he dived into it, his feet clattering on the boards, and the canteens clanking about his waist.

Once he was in the trench he could see nothing. It was dark and deserted there and his feet made thunderous sounds on the duck-boards. He smelled the dampness and the mud, and the odor of rotting sandbags and wet wood. There was an unclean smell like that from a common dump, that arose from the piles of tin cans on the other side of the parapet, left there by the last troops that had occupied that trench. Goop hurried along. He knew every plank in that flooring, he had walked over them so many times. He had only one desire—to get back to the guns as soon as possible, in order to escape with as little censure as he might, for the wrath of his comrades was likely to be great.

At the guns the men cursed feelingly. There were eight men in the trench waiting for their supper and the longer they waited, the more they raged. Two, a gunner and a loader, were on duty with each of the section's two guns, and the other men had nothing to do but eat and go to sleep. It began to look as if they would have to sit up all night, or else go to bed supperless. At intervals of five minutes one of the men on guard with the guns stuck his head over the parapet into the trench, with an anxious question regarding Goop.

"That thick, ignorant dummy," cried the sergeant, at last. "If he doesn't show up pretty soon, I'm going to turn him in. He's always on his own foot. I'm getting —— good and sick of it!"

"If his brains was to turn to water," observed one of the men, "he wouldn't have enough moisture in his skull to give a cootie a drink."

At this moment Goop's dainty feet were heard pattering on the duckboards, with but slightly less noise than an eight-inch gun with a tractor mount would make, and while the gunners thought up appropriate words of welcome, Goop appeared, and put down his cans.

"Where have you been?" inquired the sergeant, with certain additions.

"I wuz delayed a bit," answered Goop, absent-mindedly tucking in his wandering shirt. "I fell in a shell-hole full uv water."

From long experience the members of the gun crews knew the folly of trying to impress Goop with the fact that he had done wrong, so they held their peace and proceeded to eat.

"All right," said the sergeant meaningly. "I'll keep you in mind for the next dirty job there is to be done."

The sergeant finished his supper, smoked a cigaret, then went into the one dugout where the whole detail slept, shook the rats out of his blankets and went to sleep full-pack, that is to say, in his clothes. One by one the others followed, leaving the trench to the care of the four men on the parapet.

Ensued then the routine of the night. It was a very, very black night, and the four men by the guns drowsily watched the star-shells going up from the enemy trenches, and hoped for an early relief. Off to the west, toward St. Mihiel, a barrage rumbled, where some raid was in progress. The night was very quiet otherwise. There was no wind to moan through the wire and make the posts sway. Just black stillness, and occasional flares and sharp cold.

The loader of number two gun raised himself suddenly on his elbow.

"What's that?" he whispered.

The gunner harkened.

"What's what?"

"I can hear marchin'," cried the loader. "Listen!"

The gunner harkened again. He heard the sliding rattle of the lever being pulled back on the other gun. It was not the loader's imagination then; there really was something out there. Then the gunner heard, too. He couldn't tell what he heard, but he heard *something*, and anything that made a noise out there was worth investigating.

"Sh-sh-shall I fire?" asked the gunner.

"Le-le-let's call Johnny," answered the loader, speaking with difficulty, for if he got his tongue between his hammering teeth it would be badly bitten.

"M-m-might be a wire party. G-g-git him!"

The loader crawled backward into the trench and was gone. The gunner listened. The noise was louder, more distinct, no wire-menders those. Besides, who would mend the wire in front of an empty trench? But the gunner dared not fire, lest he be flayed alive, and the reason for this will be disclosed in its place.

The gun-crews slept in a dugout at the foot of a sap that ran off the main trench. There were double-deck bunks in there for ten men. Nine of them were used by the men off duty and the tenth one for storage of slickers, rubber boots and spare ammunition. Into this dugout came the loader. It was very, very dark, blacker than a wolf's stomach in there and the loader upset a canned willie box that was used as a mess kit-rack. The contents of the box crashed gloriously to earth.

"Johnny!" cried the loader.

There was silence, save for the murmuring and bubbling of men fathoms deep in sleep. The loader pawed his way across the floor. Why was the place so dark? Why did he feel so lost in that stinking hole? He had called men before and been called himself from that same dugout and on just as dark a night. A tin hat fell from a nail and thudded on the loader's arm.

"Ow!" rubbing his arm, "Johnny!"

Where did that sergeant sleep? In the bottom bunk, to the left, sure. A good clout in the back would wake him up. *Thud!* The sleeper turned over with a creaking of bunk wire.

"Waddayuhwan'?" he queried.

"Johnny!" husked the loader. "Johnny, listen!"

A snore was the answer. The sergeant slept again.

"Maybe I better go back again," thought the loader. "Maybe the noise is over now."

Maybe the noise wasn't, too. Suppose he went back and found the gunner in his own gore! Maybe the raiders had got into the trench already. Hark! Running feet on the duckboards; the loader's heart congealed within him, a form burst in through the door. No bashful man this one, fearful of waking the other sleepers.

"Johnny!" he roared. "Johnny! The Boche!"

Then he was gone, back to his gun.

There were eight simultaneous grunts, and eight pairs of hobnails thudded on the planking of the floor at once.

"Wha's that?" queried the sergeant. "Who said Boche?"

"They're comin'!" cried the loader. Discord reigned. The dugout was small, as any shelter hewed from the earth by sweating men always is. There was room in there for ten men to sleep, but not for nine to stand between the bunks. Moreover it was dark, these men had been suddenly awakened from sleep by an alarm of the enemy, and not yet being fully awake, were a bit confused. They struggled to put on gas-masks and pistols, but they were so crowded and jammed that their movements were impeded. They smote one another and harsh words were said. A strange medley of words came from the mouth of the dugout.

"Gas mask—" "Wheren ——'s my gat?" "Ow!" Clank! "Gimme that hat, that's mine!" "Git off my foot!" "Aw fer —— sake, where's the fire?"

A man shot from the door like a seed squeezed from an orange and fell crashing on the duckboards. A struggling mass followed him, going to earth like trees before a hurricane as their feet met the first man's body. Eight voices cried at once—

"Git off me!"

Then those on the bottom of the pile groaned aloud as those on the top rose to their feet. A hobnailed shoe is a fearsome thing in which to stand upon a man's frame. At last they were all up and departed down the duckboards as swiftly as they might, belting on pistols, tying gas-masks in place and settling their helmets firmly. In a moment they were at the gun positions.

"Johnny," came the whispered question from the parapet. "Johnny, sh'll we fire? Sh'll we fire, Johnny?"

"Shut up," said Sergeant Johnny. "Keep your fingers off those triggers. The man that fires before I give the word, I'll knock him for a loop. Get away from those guns, you, and let the regular gunners up."

Then men on guard moved away from the guns and the regular gunners took their places, the gunner in rear of the piece, the loader to the left, and the second loader in rear of him. The other men of the gun crew, three to each gun, lay down in positions as near the gun as possible, ready to lend a hand passing ammunition, or to replace casualties.

"We're a man shy," cried the gunner of number two piece. "There's only five men here."

"Who's absent?" asked the sergeant. The man called their names softly.

"Goop!" cried Johnny. "That unspeakable! Now what's all this about?"

He lay down and strained his eyes into the darkness. There was blackness unfathomable out there, but no sound. Far away across the fields the lights soared from the enemy trenches. Silence.

"Who waked us up?" asked the sergeant.

The men who had been on guard replied.

"We heard marchin'," they said.

"I don't hear anything now," answered the sergeant. "I think you were hearin' things. Wait here now for a while. We might's well, we're all up. I'll go get Goop. Now listen, you guys. Don't shoot unless they rush you. Remember that once you start shootin', you'll give the position away, the Boche will know there's guns in this trench, and they'll knock it into a plug hat. Now, if you want to ditch the gravy train, just fire a clip or two."

The sergeant went straight to the dugout and thrust his hand into Goop's bunk. Empty. The sergeant began to feel around among the other bunks and his knee struck something soft. At once his hand shot out and seized what felt like some one's neck.

"Wa-a-a-ah!" shrieked Goop. "Don't shoot, I surrender!"

"Shut up! You —— fool, come out of that," said the sergeant, his nerves twittering with the suddenness of Goop's war-cry.

"Is that you, Johnny?" asked Goop, in thankful tones. "I thought it wuz the Boche."

"How come you're undressed?" demanded the sergeant, turning his flashlight on Goop, who was clad in underwear and O. D. shirt.

"My clothes got all wet when I fell in the shell-hole," explained Goop. "This is my extra underwear an' shirt."

The sergeant allowed Goop to put on his shoes and the two returned to the guns, the sergeant meanwhile expressing his thoughts of Goop with great vehemence.

"I didn't have no dry clothes," said Goop humbly. "You wouldn't expect a fellar to go rushin' out in the cold night air without no clothes, would yuh?"

"Tomorrow," remarked the sergeant, "when that mail orderly comes around, I'm going to give him full permission to knock you for a row of brick henhouses, and if he does it, I'll get him so drunk next pay-day he won't recover for a month. Get up on that parapet where you belong."

From the darkness beyond the wire came no sound. The gunners lay a long time, listening and peering, but there was no sign of the enemy. "You dumb eggs ought to be shot," said the sergeant, "for getting us up like this. Let's go back to bed."

Tramp, tramp, tramp, clink, tinkle, clank. Tramp, tramp, tramp.

"Johnny, Johnny, sh'll we fire? Hear 'em Johnny?"

Indeed Johnny heard them. The whole German Army was marching on the trench, feet pounding, canteens clanking, bayonets rattling. The noise was loud enough to be heard in Toul and yet no flares went up from the American side, no guns rattled, no shells burst.

"MacAfee, you beat it up into the town and see what's goin' on up there. Goop, you're such a wise guy, you haul yourself down this trench till you come to that doughboy outpost in the other end of it. It's about a thousand yards from here. Ask 'em if they hear those guys out there. Then you come back here. *Savvy?* You come back."

The two slid into the trench and departed at a run. The sergeant joined the guns once more. He yearned to give the word that would send a storm of bullets ripping into that marching mass, but the attackers might go to the right or left and if he did not fire until later, he might catch them in flank and do far more execution than he could now.

The tramping came no nearer. Instead, it seemed to be fainter than at first.

"They're going to make a raid on the town," thought the sergeant.

Then the marching stopped and all was quiet once more. The men stirred uneasily. What kind of a stunt was Fritz pulling off, anyway?

They were not green troops, these Americans, but they were as yet untried. The Summer before they had garrisoned the Mexican Border, and lain out in the dark and listened just as they were doing now. They had learned then not to shoot blindly at every sound, but to wait a while, until they were reasonably sure of what they were shooting at. They had been on other fronts in France, but not on any active ones. This one they were on was active enough, at times.

A few weeks before, a traveling circus, as those German organizations that leaped from front to front were called, had gone over in the fog and attacked Seichprey, a short distance to the east, and taken very nearly the entire garrison of the sector back to Germany with them. That the garrison had safely arrived beyond the Rhine was proved by the fact that a number of copies of the "Continental Times," an English paper published in Germany, had been thrown over the American lines by German aviators. In the paper was a photograph of the American prisoners, with Spud Lewis, whose old gent ran a cigar store in Taunton, sitting in the front row with a broad grin on his face. The gunners wondered if this were about to be a second Seichprey.

The silence continued. Where would the attack fall? If only a rifle would flash, if only a machine gun would stutter, or a one-pounder *ping*, the suspense would not be so terrible.

"Look, Johnny," whispered one of the men. "There ain't no lights gone up from the Boche trenches for a long time."

"You're crazy," said the sergeant.

"No, I ain't. Watch!"

The sergeant did. He timed himself with his wrist-watch and for the space of twenty minutes not a light flared from the enemy trenches. At the end of that time one appeared, gleaming brightly.

"Maybe they run out of flares," said the sergeant.

Hark! What was that? A machine gun clattering? From the left, and on a level with the guns, came a steady rattle, rapidly growing louder.

"What the —— is that?" asked the sergeant mystified.

The gunners listened with tight throats. The sound came nearer yet and they could distinguish what it was.

"It's Goop," said some one, "comin' down the duck-boards an he's sure burnin' the wind."

Goop arrived at the guns. The sergeant had climbed down off the parapet and was awaiting him in the trench, while the other men turned about in their places and stuck their heads over the edge of the trench, to hear what Goop would report. Goop's face fairly gleamed, it was so white. Every one could see it distinctly in the darkness.

"Ga-a-agh!" gasped Goop and they heard him fall heavily against the trench wall. The sergeant turned his flashlight on him, for he thought Goop had been hit. The tiny light showed Goop with wide open, gasping mouth, his steel helmet hanging down the back of his neck and the chin-strap nearly cutting his throat. The bottom part of his underwear shone whitely, but though he shivered and shook, he showed no sign of hurt.

"What's eating you?" asked the sergeant.

"Huh-huh-huh," panted Goop, rolling his eyes. "The outpost-huh-all dead-huh-huh—in the bottom of the trench-huh-blood all over the place."

"Did you see any Germans?" asked the sergeant.

"Heard 'em—talkin', then I beat it."

"Come down here," called the sergeant, "everybody."

This order was obeyed with extreme promptness, since both gun crews were half-way over the edge of the trench anyway. The men clustered about, wide eyes and white faces gleaming in the flashlight's beam. The light went out with a tiny click.

"MacAfee ain't come back yet," hazarded some one.

"Maybe he's took," said another.

"Listen," said the sergeant. "We aren't the only troops in this sector. They can't kill everybody and pretty quick a scrap is going to start somewhere. Then we'll know where we're at. If they come along the trench, God pity 'em. Take down number two gun and put it up on the rear wall, so's to sweep west and south. Sheeley, you and Bissett go down and get every bit of ammunition we got. I'll stay right here and when I blow my whistle, every one cut loose. No shootin', though, unless there's a Hun right at the muzzle, unless I give the signal. Manly, take my light and beat it down to the sap and bring up those three rifles and the Very pistol hanging up by my bunk."

"Johnny," spoke up Goop plaintively, "please can I go with Manly an' get a blanket an' some stockin's? I'll catch my death o' cold standin' here without no clothes on."

There was considerable laughter at this and Goop, having received permission, went off with Manly.

"You fellars needn't to laugh," he said over his shoulder. "I run all the way up from that outpost in shoes without no stockin's, and my feet's pretty sore. If I got to be chasin' Jerries all night, I want suthin' warm to my feet."

THERE was nothing to do, now that the dispositions had been made, but to wait for the expected attack. If the outpost to the west had been surprized and killed, it meant that the attackers had gone to the left and had penetrated the lines there. Unless MacAfee returned very shortly, it would mean that the town was invested likewise. The thirteen men at the guns would be surrounded. Thirteen is an unlucky number, anyway. Thus thought the sergeant, as he waited and listened, now in the trench, now at the gun on the front wall, then at the gun on the rear wall. Things were not as silent as they had been. There were tiny sounds, such as a mouse makes sometimes, scratching in the wall. There were far-off noises, but the sound waves they sent out were so weak when they reached the ears of the men at the machine guns that it was impossible to recognize their origin. They simply knew that there was noise and movement all about them, And there were no flares from the American lines.

The sergeant shivered in the cold. The heat never kept one awake in France, at least in the sector of the armies, not even in the hottest month. He was sleepy, too. Officially, these gun crews had nothing to do but set up their guns at stand-to twice a day, and keep out of sight the rest of the time, but there was always plenty to do during daylight. The guns had to be cleaned, the trench and dugout policed, pistols overhauled, clothing dried and repaired, blankets aired, shirts read—the process of removing cooties from clothing was called "reading your shirt"—and fifty other things to be done. It is highly unpleasant to be dragged from sleep for any reason, but to be awakened by an alarm, to find that one is surrounded, and then to have to wait and wait for the enemy to disclose himself and attack, is very close to being unbearable.

The sergeant determined that he would go on a scout. If Goop was to be believed, and his fright had been too real to be doubted, then the enemy held the trench to the west. MacAfee had not come back from his mission, so the Germans were probably in the eastern part of it, too. It was strange that there had been no firing in the town.

"Goop come back yet?" asked the sergeant.

No answer.

"Goop around?" he called in a louder voice, but not too loud.

Silence.

"By ——," cried the sergeant, "if he's crawled under the bunks again, I'll kill him when I come back. Wait here for me, fellers, I'm going down the trench aways. If you hear any fightin' let'er go for all you're worth."

The sergeant got down into the mud so that his feet would make no sound on the boards, and moving very cautiously, he went down the trench toward the town, holding a bomb, from which he had already drawn the pin, in his right hand.

Some moments after he was gone, a voice spoke from the darkness.

"Wuz Johnny askin' for me?" inquired Goop. "I was layin' up here with this blanket over my head and I couldn't hear him."

"Shut up!" said the gunners fiercely. "You want to give the position away?"

Goop subsided. He had established an alibi for not answering when the sergeant called and so was content.

The sergeant proceeded along the trench. The mud was very wet and cold and it was not long before his shoes were full of it and he could feel it squidging between his toes. The trench was cold and crumbly and damp to the touch, as he felt his way along with his left hand, holding the bomb ready in his right. He was very careful where he put his feet, too, for if he stumbled and fell he would probably drop the bomb, the handle would fly up and things would begin to happen, one of which would be the destruction of the sergeant. Stop. There were people in the trench and coming his way. He climbed up on the parapet. There were people there, too, in great numbers, for the sound of them was quite clear. They were advancing stealthily, but steadily. The sergeant could hear them breathing. He idly wondered whether the Germans would kill him, or whether he would be mown down by his own guns.

"Halt!" he cried and raised his bomb on high.

The breathing and the movement and the little scraping sounds stopped. The unseen men had halted. No sound, throbbing darkness, and the sergeant still holding his bomb ready to hurl. He felt that he would lose his mind in another minute.

"Who's there?" he called.

"Friend," came the reply in a stern, heavy voice, with just a touch of menace in it.

"Come up and let me look at you," said the sergeant, "one at a time."

He was not the least bit reassured. Two out of three Germans, so it seemed, could speak English, and a surprizingly large number spoke it with an American accent. He comforted himself with the thought that he could hurl the bomb into the midst of them, and that he would not be taken without shedding some Hunnish gore. No one advanced, nor were any more words passed, but the sergeant heard rustlings to right and left, so he knew he was being surrounded.

"All right," he thought, "have it your own way."

And he drew back his arm to throw the bomb.

"Lootenant," came a hoarse whisper from the darkness, "I wouldn't go up there yet. I know that guy's a Hun!"

The sergeant's arm fell.

"Come on up," said he. "I won't bite. Don't be such a —— fool. Want me to heave a grenade at you?"

A voice spoke again.

"Are you one of the machine gunners?"

"That's what."

"Who's in command here?"

"I am."

Footsteps sloshed and shadows appeared.

"Have you been attacked?" asked the heavy voice again.

"No," answered the sergeant, "but we expected to be. We'd better get off the parapet."

The mysterious company got down, with a great deal of splashing and floundering, and the man with the heavy voice proceeded to interview the sergeant.

"Did that man MacAfee come from your outfit?" asked the heavy voice.

"Yes, I sent him over to see if any one in the town could hear all the marching."

"He came surging in to the P. C. and said his machine-gun post had been attacked.

We sent him back to the battalion and came over to investigate."

"Did you hear the marching?" asked the sergeant.

"No, we didn't hear any. We just took over about an hour ago. We're from the Forty-third; we relieved the Forty-second."

A light began to break on the sergeant's mind.

"How did you come in," he asked, "from Rambucourt?"

"No, we came as far as Bouconville and then a guide led us the rest of the way."

"Why, he must have taken you right across No Man's Land!"

"Well," said the heavy voice, "I don't know about that. There was a road there and we followed the guide; that's all I know about it. Are you an officer?"

"No, I'm a sergeant," answered Johnny at once.

At once there was a distinct chill in the air.

"Oh!" said the other man. A pause. "I am," he continued.

"A second lieutenant," said the sergeant.

"Why, yes, how did you know?" exclaimed the other man. "I haven't got on any bars."

"I just guessed," said the sergeant. "Well, that's the end of our attack. I guess it was your outfit we heard marchin' out there in the road. I'm just as glad. I was afraid we'd have to give the position away."

"Is this a masked position?"

"Sure is," answered the sergeant. "The trench is supposed to be empty. We keep the guns out of sight during the day and stay under cover ourselves. I think we've got away with it so far. There hasn't a shell or a one-pounder or any machine gun fired at us since we came in. I have to watch these birds pretty careful though."

"Isn't there any one in this trench at all?"

"There's some doughboys in the lower end. By ——!" cried the sergeant, "I nearly forgot. A man I sent down to their outpost said the outpost was dead and in the bottom of the trench. He said he heard Jerries talking."

"We'd better look into it, hadn't we?" asked the lieutenant. "I've got a platoon here and it's too late to go back to bed now."

There was a deep groan from the darkness at this announcement, but as it was impossible to tell who had groaned, and as the whole platoon could not be put under arrest, the lieutenant affected not to hear.

"All right," agreed the sergeant. "We'll have a look at it. Wait a minute, till I find the man that went down there first." They walked toward the gun positions.

"Goop! Where the —— is that man? Goop, come here!"

As usual, Goop failed to reply. He reckoned without his host, as the saying goes. The eager hands of half a dozen men seized his blanketed form and hurled him into the trench.

"Here he is, Johnny," they cried. Goop arose from the mud and drew his blanket about him.

"I wuz jus' gettin' ready to climb down," he said. "You fellars needn't to be so rough."

"Who's this?" queried the officer, for he could not see Goop in the dark.

"It's the man that said the outpost was dead. Lead out, Goop, and show us where the outpost was," said the sergeant.

"Johnny," said Goop, in hurt, sorrowful tones, "what did I ever do to you?"

"Go on! Git! I'll do somethin' to you in a minute."

Thus urged, Goop led the way and the platoon followed him.

After they had gone a short distance the lieutenant halted. The men in the rear perforce halted too, and Goop, not hearing following steps on the duck boards, stopped in his turn.

"We can't be too careful," began the lieutenant. "If there are Boche in this trench we don't want to walk up on them in this formation."

"I don't think there are any," said the sergeant. "I think that crazy soldier was seeing things. You can imagine lots of things on a night like this."

"Yes, but it's well to be cautious. We've only got one life to lose. Let's send out flankers."

"Sure."

A flanking party was sent out on either side, leaving no one in the trench but Goop, Johnny, the lieutenant, and the platoon runner. "Now I'm the officer," said the lieutenant, "and I'll answer any challenge."

"You can't make me mad that way," answered the sergeant.

If the party were challenged and the challengers happened to be Boche, he that answered the challenge would be the first target.

The duck boards ended and the trench went down-hill a way, and crossed the little brook. Then the trench went up-hill on the other side.

"This would be a great place for a bunch of raiders to come through," thought the sergeant, "because the slope on either side of the brook would mask fire from the trench and from the town."

The stream made a regular communication trench from No Man's Land to the rear of the American lines.

It was disagreeable work, toiling painfully through the mud and expecting every second to hear a harsh voice cry out, or a machine-gun clatter or a grenade fizzing.

Plop!

"There goes a light," cried the lieutenant.

They all ducked. The light shone only into the upper part of the trench, where it made the men's faces shine with a ghastly light. The heads leaped into sharp prominence, the lieutenant's and the sergeant's, their eyes uplifted, watching the flare, the runner, crouching against the wall of the trench, and Goop, with his blanket over his head. The men had no fear of being seen. The trench would hide them from everything but an airplane.

A faint voice called, far off in the darkness, and on the heels of the sound came the crash of a rifle. The officer and Johnny looked at each other. Then the light went out and the four men crept cautiously forward.

"Halt!"

Intense silence, then the soft slap of a holster being unbuttoned. The officer was drawing his pistol. The challenge had come from directly in front, from the trench itself. No further word was spoken on either side, the four men waited, scarce daring to breathe, for any movement might bring their death.

"Who goes?" asked a voice, rather haltingly.

Now that was not the proper way to challenge and moreover the words were not good English. Then the lieutenant spoke.

"Friends," said he. "This is Lieutenant Graves of 'B' Company."

"All right, lootenant, we t'ought you was Boche."

The officer went forward and there was the sound of a collision with something solid. The officer cursed.

"Turn on a light," he cried. "There's some one dead in the bottom of the trench."

The sergeant hunted frantically for his flashlight.

"There," exclaimed Goop, in triumphant tones, "didn't I tell you there wuz some one dead here?"

The sergeant found the light at last and its radiance shone bravely forth. There was a pile of reels of barbed wire, half a dozen sand-bags, a slicker across the top, the lieutenant with his hand on the slicker, and two very white faces peering at the sergeant from across the sand-bags.

"Huh!" said the officer. "Here's your dead men!"

"It never was there before," cried Goop desperately. "It felt like men. Who put that slicker on them sand-bags?"

"Who the —— barricaded this trench?" asked the sergeant. "You birds expecting an attack? Afraid we're going to steal you or something?"

"The major said to barricade it," spoke up one of the men. "Some one took a crack at him from back there, when he was scoutin' around. He said there was Boche in the other end of the trench."

"Tha's right," spoke the other man. "I was wit' him. Bang! Bullet hit trench. Major run lak ——."

The sergeant began to think of several things.

"Who'd you hear talking?" he asked Goop. "Couldn't you tell they were speaking English?"

"They wuzn't," said Goop mournfully. "They wuz speakin' German, I heard 'em."

"Mebbe he hear me talk wit' my brudder," said the man behind the barricade.

"This guy's one o' them Aroostook potato-bugs," explained the other of the two. "He's a frog. Potato-bugs and lumberjacks, this regiment's full of 'em. 'N herrin' chokers," he added, as an afterthought.

"Go out and bring me in those flankers," the officer told the runner. "I'm going home to bed."

He snorted angrily. No one made any further comment, and after a while men were heard clambering down the sides of the trench, or standing at the top, and shuffling their feet in the mud.

"Who did that firing a little while ago?" cried the officer in angry tones.

"We run into a patrol, sir," explained a voice. "We challenged an' they got up an' run, so we shot at 'em. I guess they was our fellars. They didn't come back. We hunted around to see if we'd hit any one, but we couldn't find a soul."

The officer grunted. Words are strangely inadequate at such times.

"Home, James," he commanded, and went down the trench without another word, followed by his platoon.

Goop and the sergeant remained.

"What outfit you belong to?" Johnny asked the men behind the barricade.

"Forty-third," they answered. "Second battalion. The first's over in the town."

"That officer's from your regiment then?"

"Sure, we know him. He's outta B Company."

"Then why the —— didn't he say there was some of his outfit in the other end of the trench? Aw, what can you expect!" said the sergeant disgustedly. "I knew he was a simple idiot when he first spoke. Now we'll just about get back in time for stand-to. A whole night gone to ——! Goop!"

"Whut?"

"Were you shootin' over towards this place when you were crackin' at owls?"

"Gee, I don't know. I might hev been."

"Might hev been! Might hev been! You know —— well you were. You cracked that major and gave us all this trouble. Now get the —— back where you belong."

"Now Johnny," began Goop in a conciliatory tone, "I couldn't help it. How wuz I to know them fellars would build a barricade there? How wuz I to know they wuz talkin' Canuck? I can't speak nuthin' but American. How can I tell whether a fellar's speakin' French er Canuck er Boche er Greek er anything?"

"Shut up," said the sergeant. "You give me a headache."

The time for stand-to was at hand. For an hour before dawn the men were supposed to be at the guns in readiness for an attack and when the first streaks of daylight appeared the guns were taken down, the men had breakfast, and then dived into the dugout for a few hours' more sleep.

GOOP and the sergeant returned to the gun positions. The men were at the guns and the trench was deserted, but an angry muttering could be heard from the darkness where the guns were. The sergeant called to the gun that was on the rear wall.

"Take down that piece and set it up where it belongs."

The gunners came in with many words.

"Is that true, what them doughboys told us?" asked one.

"Yup," said the sergeant. "'Louse brains' takes a crack at the major over there and keeps us up all night because he finds a couple of sand-bags in the bottom of the trench."

"You ought t'be strung up by the thumbs," remarked one of the weary gunners, "you six feet an' a half of salvage halter-shank. If I wuz sargint o' this outfit I'd send yuh out to the wire and then let a clip go at yuh."

The general opinion seemed to be that it was folly to waste good breath and energy in trying to bring Goop to a realization of the enormity of his offense. The men were too tired to get up a good "mad."

"T' —— with him," said one. "He's simple. He ain't got no *savvy*, anyhow. Let's go to bed."

"Set up the gun," said the sergeant. "Set up the gun first. It's time for stand-to."

The men mounted the parapet and set up the gun. The gun crew on the front wall had heard the details of the affair at the outpost, for one of the spare gunners had projected his head into the trench when he heard the doughboys going by, and had secured the information from them. The two gun crews were too far apart for them to converse, but the sergeant and the penitent Goop stayed in the trench and could hear the muttering from the two guns. Growl, growl, growl.

"Shut up!" cried the sergeant at last. "If a Jerry patrol should go by, you'll give the position away."

The growling ceased.

"Honest, Johnny," said Goop pleadingly, "I didn't mean to do it. I didn't see no major. How was I to know them guys wuz speakin' Canuck? Listen, Johnny, them sand-bags felt just like a stiff. They had slickers on to 'em, too. How wuz I to know——"

"Aw, shut up! What the —— are you doing down here in the trench? Get up on the parapet where you belong!"

Goop sighed heavily and, wrapping the blanket about his long shanks, he clambered up to his post.

The hour just preceding dawn seems to be the longest and coldest of the entire night.

To the soldier at the front it is the worst of the twenty-four. The sleepy cooks crawl shivering from their blankets and begin to break up ration boxes to kindle the fire in the rolling kitchens, the artillerymen in the observation posts shake themselves into wakefulness and try to keep their eyelids apart long enough to see any barrage rockets that might be fired, while at the guns the gunner very carefully lays the piece on "normal barrage," and then he and Number One, who sits on the opposite seat, slip down between the wheels and to sleep. If the man at the telephone gets a call for a barrage, he will yell, Number One will awake, reach up and pull the lanyard, and by the time the officers get there the gun crew will be in their proper places again.

The infantry are hauled out and made to line the parapet. At stand-to, they are the only ones who really stand, they and the cooks who are getting breakfast. The auto rifleman, with his gun on its tripod, the one-pounder gunners, with their toy cannon, even the Stokes mortar battery, all may lie down beside their weapons, and who is to know if they are asleep or awake? The infantry, though, are not without resource. They go to sleep standing up.

Johnny suddenly awoke. He shook his head to get the sleep out of his eyes and looked eagerly at his watch. It would be daylight in twenty minutes. Golly, if an officer had happened to go by and had found him asleep! There'd be none around now, it was too near daylight.

"I might as well send those birds to bed," thought Johnny. "There won't be any one around now and they must be pretty near all in."

Also Johnny could go to bed himself. The sergeant reached up over the parapet and dragged at the tail of an overcoat he found there.

"Tell 'em to come down," he whispered.

They came down very rapidly.

"You can beat it to bed," said the sergeant. "We'll take a chance this once. The men that didn't finish their tour of guard when we had the scare, stay on the gun until it gets light, then come down and wake me. I don't want to take any chance on your giving the position away by leaving a gun set up for all the Jerries on Mont Sec to see. Beat it!"

The men departed hastily.

"Goop!" called the sergeant, "you take Bisset's place on number two gun. See if you can dope out how to tell a dead man from a sand-bag while you're waiting."

"But Johnny," protested Goop, "I ain't got no clothes on to me! I'll freeze in a other half-hour!"

"Shut up!" said the sergeant savagely, "or I'll knock you so far it'll cost a month's pay to send you a postcard! Come on," said he to the other men, "let's go to bed. You birds on the guns call me when it begins to get light. I'll only get about ten minutes' sleep, but I can use that, I'll inform the cock-eyed world!"

Then they went down into the sap and slept without even removing their arms.

Goop took his place at the breech of the gun, then crouched down and wound his blanket about him.

"G-great land o' Goshen," he stuttered through clicking teeth, "I never wuz so c-cold in my life. He needn't to be so d-darned sore—how wuz I to know?"

The other man on guard with him, who acted as loader, made no answer. He was too sleepy and cold.

THE longest night must end and the dreariest hour go by. When the old, rotting wire posts—the wire on them would not keep out a lusty cat—began to appear out of the grayness and the trench could be seen looping across the country like a gigantic snake, the men on guard stretched themselves, shivered, and began to take down the guns. A man from number one slid into the trench and departed to awaken the sergeant. Number two's loader, whose name was Shorty, blew on his fingers, then assisted Goop to take the gun off the tripod. Goop put his blanket where it would not be in the way and prepared to remove the tripod.

"Hey, Shorty," he whispered, "snap out of it! Give us a hand."

Shorty made no reply and Goop looked up at him in surprize. Shorty was staring down the slope of the parapet.

"What's them?" croaked Shorty, pointing. Goop looked. He saw the slope before the trench littered with bully-beef tins, the rotting, crazy wire posts, and a great multitude of black objects, like a forest of tree-trunks, moving bodily forward. A great, great, many of them. Goop looked again, for what seemed a long, long time.

Slam! The gun went back on the tripod. Shorty threw himself down beside it.

"Feed!" yelled Goop. *Rap-rap-rap-rap-rap-rap.*

The sergeant had just arisen from his bunk and was going out the dugout door when he heard the firing.

"That —— Goop!" he said. "He's let a clip run through. I'll kill him for that!"

The operation of taking out the loaded clip from a machine gun was a ticklish task and sometimes a butter-fingered gunner or loader would let the little gadget fall and the clip would run through. The clatter would be very trying to the nerves of all within hearing. The sergeant leaped upon the parapet with murder in his heart.

"Wahoo!" shrieked Goop, "Ya-a-am!"

It was still fairly dark and in the half-light of dawn the sergeant could not see what Goop could. The sergeant seized Goop by the shoulder. Then he saw.

The muzzle of the gun swept from right to left and back again, and the clip traveled its steady way through the breach. When it was empty Shorty shoved in another, Goop swept the lever back and the steady rattle began again. Just below the gun shadowy, ghostly objects kept dropping, dropping, dropping, like men diving into a swimming-tank. A horrid chill struck the sergeant's heart.

"You aren't killing our men, are you?" he shrieked in Goop's ear.

"Hooray!" Goop answered him. "Weee! Wow!"

A chorus of wild yells from the grayness of No Man's Land echoed Goop's howls. A ruddy light spread over the scene. The sergeant looked up. A red rocket had just burst, and as he watched it went out.

"Listen," cried the sergeant, shaking Goop by the shoulder. "What the —— are you shootin' at? Who told you to fire? Listen to me, or I'll blow your conk off!"

The sergeant drew his pistol.

"Hey! Johnny! Whoopee! Looka me kill 'em, Johnny! Looka that one, Johnny!"

He pointed to a body not two feet from the gun muzzle.

"Wow! Come on you weiniewursts!"

The gun clattered gloriously once more. The sergeant straightened. What was the matter with the other gun? *Blam! Berrom!* Rumble, rumble, rumble, like a heavy wagon rolling across a plank bridge. The sergeant looked in the direction of the sound. To the west, clear back on the Bouconville-Rambucourt road, along the road eastward as far as Rambucourt, and then north to Xivray, was what appeared to be a continuous line of brush fires. The sergeant knew, though, that it wasn't any such thing. That line of fire, as straight and as evenly laid as if it was from the burners about a gigantic gas oven, was the continual bursting of shells. A box barrage had been laid down, a wall of fire that a mouse could not pass and live.

"Wahoo!" shrieked Goop. "Lookit, Johnny!"

The sergeant went over to the other gun, where its crew sweated about it. It began to fire suddenly and as suddenly subsided. The crew clustered thickly about it again, waving their hands, swearing horribly, and in each other's way.

"What's the matter?" shrieked the sergeant.

"Jam!" they cried back.

The sergeant ran back to the other gun and after shouting himself black in the face, induced Goop to hold the gun muzzle out of the way long enough for the sergeant to drag in the body from in front of the gun. It was a hard job, for the man was of huge frame. The sergeant turned the body on its back. It was a great big German, as big as several houses. He wore the ribbon of the Iron Cross through his buttonhole and upon the right side of his gray frock coat, just above the belt, was the badge with the silver wreath and helmet, that showed he had been twice wounded.

White braid on his collar, high leather boots and patent leather reinforcements on his breeches. He had his belt full of potato-masher grenades, hanging by their hooks. He held a pistol firmly clutched in his right hand and his eyes looked straight into the sergeant's. But he was dead. He was so newly killed that there was not much blood, but the sergeant could see where the German had been hit and he knew, too, that there was no sight in those staring eyes.

"Hooray!"

The sergeant started violently. Goop still howled and shrieked. The crew of number one clustered about their gun and the air was full of bolts, stops, barrels, screws and pistons. The crew of number Two lined the parapet with a row of startled faces, their eyes protruding and their mouths open. The sergeant waved his hand at them and they disappeared, like so many Punches. The sergeant ran over to the right-hand gun to see if he could give any aid and the heads reappeared again. It was rapidly growing lighter.

"By ——," thought the sergeant, "we're in for a royal time. This is no raid. This is a drive. If Goop's gun jams, good night!"

He ran to the other gun and began to pull the men away from it.

"Get into the trench," he cried. "Get under cover!"

The men went dazedly. They had taken the gun apart and there were enough pieces of machine gun on the ground, spread out on a slicker, to make several automobiles. These the sergeant gathered, with the help of one or two more, and the whole party went into the trench, where the sergeant dragged the members of number two's crew off the parapet by their belts.

Goop bellowed like a crazy man, but his gun clattered faithfully. The sergeant climbed the parapet again. He was rather at a loss to know what to do. The night had been so full of surprizes that if he had been suddenly hailed from the wire and asked what he meant by firing on an American column, he would not have thought it at all strange. He could see more clearly now what was going on.

"I guess there's not much chance of a mistake," he said to himself. There was a long column coming through a lane in the wire and deploying on the inner side of the last line of posts. The shape of their helmets, their gray uniforms, even the red piping of their trousers was clearly visible. They were all big, strong huskies. The Germans were in column of squads, or at least they were advancing four abreast, and they deployed in the smoke of Goop's gun. They were that near. It was like killing sheep. Those in the rear were prevented from throwing their grenades because of their close formation, and those that deployed had no opportunity.

The pile of corpses was beginning to rise so high that the advancing Germans had to climb over it. After the first howls they had uttered, the enemy was quiet. They advanced silently and grimly and Goop, whooping and yelling like an Algerian full of "white mule," poured lead into them at point-blank range. The gun was above the advancing troops and its fire was, of course, plunging, so that the bullets went into the ground after they had gone through the first rank. Otherwise the destruction done by the gun would have been greater than it was. The most of the attackers were sheltered by a dip in the ground, a long dead space, where the creek called the Rupt du Mad wandered diagonally across No Man's Land.

While Shorty shoved a fresh clip into the gun, Goop leaped up and shook his fist at the attackers. The sergeant had not the slightest doubt but what the shock had turned Goop's mind. Compared with that howling figure, clad only in flapping shirt and underwear, a lunatic would have appeared as sane as a judge.

"The first thing to do," decided the sergeant, "is to get that other gun going. By golly, I forgot to send up a rocket for a barrage."

He looked around again. A high wall of smoke surrounded that section of the country, and fire blazed at the base of it. It was growing lighter every minute and the Germans realized it as well as any one. They began to set off smoke-bombs and the reak from them swept over the ground like fog driven in from the sea. *Ping! Ping! Ping!*

"Thank God," said the sergeant, "we aren't *all* alone; there goes a one-pounder in back of us!"

Then he scrambled into the trench.

"How you comin' on that gun?" inquired the sergeant.

Two men labored on it, cursing.

"Where's the rest of the crew?"

One of the men silently pointed. Both gun crews were on the parapet at some little distance, popping away with their pistols.

"You'd think them fools would have sense enough to help fix this —— gun," remarked one of the men bitterly, "stead o' rushin' off sightseein'. I got it near done, though. It was a —— of a jam. I ain't kiddin' yuh."

He coughed, for the smoke-bombs were beginning to make themselves felt.

"Think there's gas around?" asked the sergeant.

"Naw, jus' smoke," said the man with the gun. "Now then, let's set her up!"

"I'll send you down some of these sightseers," said the sergeant. He went down to where the gun crews lay on the parapet and reaching up, pulled them down by the legs.

"Come down, come down!" he cried. "Where do you think you are? At a movie? Grab hold and help with that gun!"

The sergeant managed to pull down three or four, and them he herded back to number one gun. They hoisted the gun to the parapet, and it soon joined its hacking cough to that of number two.

"By ——," cried the sergeant. "I keep forgetting that barrage rocket. Where's one of those rifles?"

"I know, Johnny," said one of the men, and he reached into a kind of shelf dug in the front wall, whence he drew a rifle and a rocket, which he proceeded to prepare. "Want me to fire it?" he asked the sergeant.

"No, keep it for a souvenir. How the —— are we going to get a barrage if you don't fire it?"

The rocket was fired forthwith.

"There," continued the sergeant, "that ought to start something."

Evidently it had, for Goop's gun stopped firing and number one, after a few half-hearted barks, stopped too. The sergeant tried to speak, but began to cough and choke. Several of the other men, who had now come down from the parapet, began to gurgle. They looked at one another in a dazed manner.

"Gas," barked the sergeant and the men climbed into their masks without further words. The sergeant climbed cautiously upon the parapet and one followed him, but the sergeant kicked him in the chest and hurled him down again. Then, making a sign to the others to stay in the trench, he proceeded to find out why the guns had ceased firing. The gas-mask prevented him swearing—who can swear with a mouth full of rubber?—and this was a sad handicap.

Goop was standing up, arms on hips, looking off into the smoke screen, which was now so dense that it was impossible to see the wire. The men at the other gun had risen to their knees and were staring down the slope in perplexity. The smoke was so thick on the sergeant's eye-pieces that he removed the rubber mask and only allowed the nose-clip to stick on his nose and close his nostrils. The mouthpiece he kept in his mouth, but he could remove it to speak.

The sergeant went over to Goop's gun and examined it. It seemed to be in working order. He removed his mouthful of rubber and shouted in Goop's ear.

"What's the matter, got a jam?"

Goop removed his mask.

"They're all gone," he said.

Then he put on his mask again. The sergeant tried to pierce the smoke, but it was impossible. He listened. There was considerable confusion out there, shouts, calls, a regular hubbub of noise. It was probably the officers trying to reorganize the attacking troops. From the sound, they were having a thankless job of it.

"Stay here and keep your eye on 'em," directed the sergeant. "Hello! Look who's here! Hey! Lay off that!" as Goop made a grab for the trigger of the gun. "Don't you see he's got his hands up?"

Goop absent mindedly tried to tuck in his shirt, but having no pants to tuck it into, was forced to give up the effort. He and the sergeant stood without speaking, while the German who was coming out of the smoke climbed the slope to where they waited for him. He held his hands above his head and looked at them mildly. He did not have on a mask, he was old, and had a gray beard. He had a white band with a red cross on it about his left arm. The sergeant went to meet him and patted the German's pockets to make sure he had no concealed weapon. The sergeant was again compelled to remove the hose from his mouth.

"—— this thing," he cried, "I'll wear it out putting it in my mouth and taking it out again! To —— with it!"

And he removed the mask entirely, but did not return it to the sack. He let the mask and the hose and the nose-clip hang on his chest for greater ease in putting on again in case of need.

"Keep your eyes peeled, Goop," said the sergeant, "while I take this bird into the trench."

Goop removed his mask also.

"Leave it to me, Johnny," said he with confidence.

The sergeant turned to go into the trench, leading the German by the wrist. A line of heads along the parapet disappeared precipitately. The sergeant ground his teeth.

"Hey, Reinhardt," he called, "can you speak enough German to talk to this guy?"

"I hope to spit in your mess-kit I can!" said the man called Reinhardt. "How do you call yourself?" he asked the German.

"Reinhardt," answered the German,

whereat there was a shout of laughter from the machine gunners.

"—— *schweinhund!*" began the American Reinhardt, "what right have you to be named Reinhardt?"

He was full of wrath, for he foresaw that as long as he stayed in the army he would never escape this moment and that the story would spread on wings of light that he had taken his own brother—no, the German was too old—his own father, then, prisoner.

"What will you?" answered the German. "It was my father's name and his father's before him. I had not the choosing of it."

"Well, how many are there out there?"

"Five hundred, perhaps a thousand. I am from the medical company. I am not sure how many there are. It is a storm regiment, perhaps two, I do not know."

"Where are you going?"

"To Toul. Where else?"

"Hey, Johnny," cried a voice from the parapet. "Lookit what I brung you! Lookit the guy I got!"

Behold Goop, smiling proudly and holding tightly by the collar a very wrathful German, who it was plain to be seen was an officer.

"You get the —— back to your gun!" cried the sergeant.

"No, but lookit, Johnny, I got a general! I went out and got him myself."

Eager hands reached up and assisted the officer to descend.

"Back to your gun!" ordered the sergeant sternly.

Goop withdrew without another word and the men in the trench heard the sound of huge feet tramping up and down in the mud. Strangely enough, the footsteps grew no fainter, but after a great deal of steady tramping, ceased altogether. It dawned upon the listeners that Goop was only registering departure and that he was just stamping up and down in place and not getting anywhere.

While they yet thought upon this fact, a bit of a head and one cautious eye protruded over the top of the trench and was swiftly withdrawn as the cautious eye met the wrathful gaze of the sergeant. The sergeant made a gesture of resignation or despair, it might have been either.

"Go on with your questions, Reinhardt, and when you get through, let's know what he says."

The prisoner was dumb. He looked at the German officer in the manner of a dog caught sucking eggs. He stated that he was a simple soldier and knew nothing. It was in his mind that if he talked, when Germany won the war and he was repatriated, he might have a lot of things to explain.

"He won't say a word," said the American Reinhardt.

"Ask the Jerry officer how his men are making out and how he likes the Yank machine gun."

The officer was dumb likewise. He returned a question to the one that was asked him.

"He wants to know if there's any officers around," said Reinhardt.

"—— with him," answered the sergeant. "Let's get some kind of order here. I'm going over the top again."

There was a scrambling noise from the parapet, but this time Goop fled back to his gun in real earnest.

The two men from number one gun met the sergeant on the parapet. They likewise had been hunting souvenirs, but the one they had between them was rather the worse for wear. He was a chubby German, young and strong, but he had been mauled by machine-gun fire. One eye hung on his cheek, his blouse was streaked with blood from a bubbling hole in front of his shoulder, and there was another rusty stain on his trouser leg above the knee.

"Hey, Reinhardt," called the sergeant, "come up here."

Reinhardt came.

"Ask this bird which wound bothers him the most," said the sergeant. "I've only got one first-aid packet. Where did you get him?" he asked the two gunners.

"He come strollin' up the hill like he was admirin' the view and we just went out and give him the glad hand," explained the gunner.

"He says his knee hurts him," said Reinhardt, after a moment's conversation with the German.

Thereat they laid the German down and the sergeant opened his first-aid packet. Then he raised the German's knee and slit up the trouser leg with a knife. Slap! A huge lump of flesh and muscle, the whole under-side of the German's thigh, released by the slitting of the cloth that had held it up, fell down into the sergeant's hand.

The sergeant went apart and was violently ill, exceedingly so, because he had had no breakfast.

"Let's take him into the trench," suggested Reinhardt, "and have his friends take care of him. The medical guy can fix him up."

So the German was borne into the trench.

"Golly," said the sergeant, wiping his eyes, "let's hope no more like that come in."

He went over to where Goop was preparing to fire once more, for the smoke was clearing away and numbers of Germans could be seen crawling from shell-hole to shell-hole, while some of those on the ground were moving arms and legs.

"Hold up a second," said the sergeant, "maybe there's some more of them out there that want to come in. Hey!" he yelled, "come on in, we won't hurt you!"

Reinhardt came out and called long and loud in German, but none seemed to care to come in and one ungracious Jerry even went so far as to hurl a grenade.

"All right," said the sergeant, "if that's the way they feel about it, knock off a few."

Goop uttered a melodious war-cry and away went the clip in merry fashion. Shorty, who had been loading for Goop all this time, approached the sergeant and asked for relief.

"I been shovin' clips inter that gun fer so long I'm all tuckered out," said Shorty, "an' I'd be much obleeged if you wuz ter put some one else on that job."

"Sure," said the sergeant, "I intended to. I've got something up my sleeve, anyway."

Here Goop called for another clip.

"Cease firing," said the sergeant, "and take down the gun. We're going to change position. Get going on number one." The men who had been firing number one ran over and took their places and very soon it was spitting death and destruction at every Boche that showed his head. What with the smoke screen drifting away and the rapid approach of broad day, the shooting was growing better.

"Now then," called the sergeant into the trench, "everybody up!"

The men all mounted the parapet.

"Number one will stay here. The regular gunner and first loader run the gun. The rest of you stick around and help. Pass ammo, carry the wounded and make yourselves useful. I'm going down the trench a ways with number two. Number two crew grab hold and change position. Follow me."

The crew of number two looked dubious.

"The gun barrel's hotter than the hinges o' ——," said one of them.

"Well, where's your mitten?" replied the sergeant. The machine gunners were supplied with heavy mittens with palms covered with chain mail, in order that they might be able to carry hot gun barrels.

The gunners looked at each other.

"How the —— do we know?" they muttered, "we ain't seen 'em since we was in trainin'-camp."

Thereupon the sergeant beat his brow.

"Pick the barrel up in your helmets then," he cried; "it's got to be moved, and —— quick."

They picked up the barrel, but instead of sliding the steel part of their helmets under it, they slid the chin strap under the barrel, so that when the party was sliding down into the trench, the barrel burned through the leather and fell upon the duck-boards and sadly burned one of the gunners. There was considerable language on the sergeant's part, but finally they got things arranged properly, the barrel resting on the steel helmet, and the men carrying it by the strap, and away they went, down to where the creek crossed the trench.

"This is just a hunch on my part," explained the sergeant, "but I think they're going to try again and they will come this way. It would take them some time to get in shape after that lacing they got up the trench, so I guess we're in time. Regular crew get on. When you see 'em comin', let 'em have it, and continue the march."

"Aw, Johnny," cried Goop, "can't I shoot the gun any more?"

The sergeant and the gunners looked at Goop and then they laughed. The tears ran down their cheeks. It was the first time they had really had an opportunity to observe Goop in the full light. His underwear was splashed with mud and he had managed to accumulate some gore on it, whether his own or another's, it was impossible to tell. His shirt flapped about him and his long red wrists protruded from the sleeves a good six inches.

Now some of the men wore their gasmasks properly; others wore only the noseclip and the hose, letting the mask hang. When they wanted to talk, they took out the hose and when they had done, they slapped it back again as quickly as they could. Goop had started out by wearing it in the first manner, then he had shifted to the second, then growing tired of taking out the hose every time he wanted to howl, he had taken the hose out of his mouth for good and let it hang with the mask, but the clip was still attached to his nose.

The purpose of the nose-clip was to close the nostrils so that the wearer would be compelled to breathe through his mouth, but if the hose from the canister containing the absorbent material was not in the wearer's mouth, there would be no advantage in having his nostrils closed.

"You're a good guy, Goop," said the sergeant, "and that was a good stunt you pulled off, but you need a rest. Give some one else a chance to kill a few. You go back and give number one a hand; they only got five men you know, with MacAfee gone."

"Aw, you're a mean guy," said Goop sorrowfully, and went up the trench in the direction of the other gun.

"If you want me for anything," directed the sergeant, "I'll be in the trench somewhere between the two guns."

HE HAD gone about half the distance back to the first gun, when he heard number two go into action.

"Golly!" he exclaimed, "I was right, after all. Let's see where they are."

He mounted the parapet, but could see nothing. He lay down, lest some one throw something at him, and crawled down the slope a way.

"Hey!" cried some one in back of him. "Look out!"

The sergeant looked out. He thrust up his head like a turtle and turned it around the horizon. On his right hand, less than twenty yards away, was a German with a light machine gun. The sergeant turned loose with his pistol at about the time the bullets from the gun began to kick up the dirt around him.

"Hey!" yelled the sergeant. "Hey! Hey! Hey!" at the same time firing his pistol at the German as rapidly as he could. The German squinted down the barrel of his gun and calmly tried to get his bursts somewhere near the sergeant.

Poor Johnny. He could not crawl backward, for he lay on the slope with his head lower than his feet, and if he got up and ran the Jerry would make a collander out of him. In a most astonishingly short space of time the pistol was empty, whereat the sergeant threw it with all his force at the German. It landed about ten yards short. The German grinned, then gave a slight jerk and collapsed beside his gun.

"Yea-a-a, Johnny," cried a far-off voice. "Did ja see me get that one?"

The sergeant knew who it was without looking. He rested his head on the cool earth for quite a while and wished some kind friend had put him in a padded cell before he had had time to enlist. Then, after he had made sure his legs would carry him, he went down into the trench again.

The gunner of number one was full of wrath and when the sergeant appeared at the gun position, he explained the reason therefor.

"I wish you'd do sumthin', Johnny," said this one, "I ain't got any too many men. If one of us was to be killed, what'll happen to this gun? I'll tell yuh, they might break through! Where's all our men gone, says you? Why one to guard them Jerries, and MacAfee gold-brickin' somewheres in the town and one to lug amminishun, only leaves two to the gun. An' this gun ain't workin' any too good. 'Sgot more stoppages 'n a payroll."

"Where's Goop? I sent him back to help you."

"Goop? ——! He ain't no use. He's got one o' them rifles an' he's runnin' round here like a crazy man. Hark at him!"

A faint howl floated down the wind, and the sergeant looking in that direction, saw Goop, on a slight eminence, his form gilded by the rising sun, aiming a rifle. Flame spat from the rifle, and a German, who had seized that moment to scuttle to a better hole, proceeded to do a handspring. Goop shrieked in triumph and called on all beholders to witness his marksmanship.

"He's lost what few brains he ever had," remarked the gunner and the sergeant silently agreed.

With the rising of the sun, matters assumed a livelier turn. The attacking troops, thrown into disorder and badly cut up in their first attempt to gain a foothold in the American lines, had reorganized and tried again farther to the west, only to run into the gun that the sergeant had placed in the creek valley for just that contingency. Now, utterly discouraged, with half their number dead or wounded, the sun above the horizon, and the entire sector awake and buzzing like a hornet's nest, the Germans began to think of home.

A great many of them had taken shelter in shell-holes and depressions of the ground in order to escape the fire from the machine guns, hoping that somehow these guns would be silenced. The day was so far advanced by now that these men decided that if they ever expected to get back alive they had better be on their way. They began to leap from shell-hole to shell-hole and to retreat by rushes. They abandoned all hope of penetrating the American line.

IN THE town, when the sound of the battle was first heard, the garrison stood to arms and said their prayers, for they expected the enemy would be upon them in force. However, when the day broke and the sun rose and no attack developed, men stuck their heads cautiously from cellar and doorway, from window and fissure, and beheld the rolling plain all dotted with Germans, some dead, some dying, three or four live ones in every shell-hole and many more skipping about from hole to hole. The town's garrison cut loose with machine gun, one pounder, Stokes mortar, rifle, pistol and grenade. The American artillery came to life and began to scatter shrapnel about, as a child throws handfuls of sand. In the trench the two guns rattled merrily and up and down went Goop, shirt-tail flapping and gas-mask waving, firing his rifle and calling attention to his marksmanship in a voice that must have been audible to every German in No Man's Land.

The guardian-angel of fools watched over Goop, else he would have been killed. The battle was not entirely one-sided. Grenades kept sailing through the air, apparently from nowhere, pistols cracked from the shell-holes. One of the gunners was shot through the head and two more had minor wounds. The wall of smoke and the rumbling barrage still surrounded the sector on three sides.

The sergeant sat on his haunches behind number two gun. If things got hot, all he had to do was to slide into the trench. He kept wishing he could wash his hands, for they were very sticky with blood where he had carried the dead gunner away. He paid no attention to the yelling Goop, and this Goop resented; Goop was hurt by the sergeant's indifference.

There was so much racket going on and so many rifles cracking that the men had lost track of the sound of Goop. They were not surprized, however, to see him appear suddenly before the gun, but they were mildly astonished to see that he bore a German, wounded or dead, they could not tell.

"There, Johnny," said Goop, hurling the German at the sergeant's feet, as a hunter might cast a trophy of the chase at the feet of a monarch. "What d'you think uv that fer gooseberries? I killed that guy deader'n a doorpost!"

The sergeant was startled out of his lethargy. He felt that he must humor Goop. The man might become violent and cut loose with that rifle at the gun crew. The sergeant observed the German. No doubt of his being *kaput*. He had been hit several times and Goop had finished him. That, though, was a minor matter. That he was over six feet tall and built like a quartermaster truck was likewise beside the point. The important thing about this Jerry was that he had a kind of tank on his back and a hose went from the bottom of the tank and under his arm. A pump arrangement protruded from the top of the tank.

"What's all this?" inquired the sergeant, more because he felt that he should say something, than because he didn't know.

"I cal'late that's a flame-thrower!" cried Goop triumphantly. "He won't throw no flame around here, will he, Johnny?"

"No," agreed the sergeant, "he won't."

"I'll fetch yuh another one," said Goop confidently, and went off like a dog retrieving sticks.

The men at the gun ceased to fire in astonishment.

"Hey, Johnny," they cried. "Look at where Goop's goin'."

Goop went straight down the slope and through the wire. He turned over a few bodies with his foot.

"Hey! come back, you'll get killed," cried the sergeant.

"Come back, Goop," yelled the gunners.

Goop waved his hand to them encouragingly and continued his way. Several Germans stood up in his path, their hands in air, and them he simply motioned to the rear. He appeared to know what he was after. The watching men saw him pause, and quarter back and forth for a moment, then stoop and pick up a body, which he slung over his shoulder. Then he picked up another object, what it was the men could not make out, and supporting the body with the hand that held his rifle, he toiled up the slope again. The gunners left their gun and gathered about the sergeant. Goop cast down the second body with a heavy thump.

"I knocked this one over a little while ago," said he, "an' I wanted to see what he had under his arm."

Goop threw down his other burden. It was a long, oblong box, such as carpenters use to carry their tools in. Goop hurled it to earth with a clatter. The gunners and the sergeant looked at it and then went away. They went at their best speed until they were out of breath. When they had arrived at a great distance, they looked back and saw Goop, a pathetic figure with a silhouette not unlike a Scotch soldier, standing by the strange box and the two bodies.

The box was a portable mine, used to blow up wire and for the demolition of dugouts and gun emplacements. The other men remembered having seen them in the training-camp, or carried by infantry men, very carefully and gingerly. They waved at Goop to come away, but he did not understand, and went down into the wire again, probably to look for more mines.

"Wouldn't you think he'd 'a' knowed what that there box was?" remarked one of the men.

"He's crazy," said the sergeant. "Crazier than a loon."

The actions of Goop had been observed by more than the gun crew. Men in the town had seen him walking about in the wire and decided that they could do the same. There were a great many dead out there and many living, who but waited the chance to surrender, and upon all these Germans, dead or alive, there would be watches and rings and belts with *Gott Mit Uns* buckles, and field-glasses and pistols, and all sorts of souvenirs, waiting for the first comer to help himself. Men in olive drab began to appear here and there.

The men at number one gun, not to be outdone, went down the slope a way, on the way back to their gun. In a very short time they were scattered and lost among the piles of slain. The sergeant raged a while and then went after them. After he had found his second gold watch, he forgot the other men and number one gun was left deserted and alone on the parapet of the trench.

After that the exodus became general. Men swarmed from the town and from the trenches in the cemetery beyond. They were all eager to capture a prisoner and glean some souvenirs to send home. The war was still on, however. Many of these souvenir hunters were shot. Often the Germans would not surrender, whereat a hand-to-hand scrap ensued, in which the Germans were the victors as frequently as the Americans. Sergeant Johnny was dismayed to see two Germans galloping from shell-hole to shell-hole, coming from the direction of number two gun, and dragging an American between them. All the Yanks in sight yelled mightily, but could do nothing, for if they shot at the Germans they might kill their own comrade.

The one-pounder from in back of the trench began to fire, chasing the three runners with little regard for the American's safety. The three dropped into a shell-hole and very shortly one of those mean pills burst either in or beside the same hole. The spectators howled their dismay. When the smoke had cleared, the Yank appeared from the shell-hole, unscathed, and hastened back to his own lines. It was noticed that he ran in a peculiar skipping manner, which was later explained by the fact that the Germans had removed his shoes and puttees the instant they had made him prisoner.

The entire garrison of the sector ran about in No Man's Land. Infantry, machine gunners, artillery observers, telephone men, Medical Corps men, a cook in his dungarees and apron, armed with a cleaver, even some men who had been wounded and had arisen from their stretchers to join in the grand hunt.

Suddenly all firing ceased. Men began to cry to each other, to point, to laugh aloud, to shout encouragement. There was a ridge that ran across the battlefield, just a tiny fold of land above the creek bank, but high enough to silhouette any one on it against the skyline. Along its crest ran a German at top speed, his hands tightly clutching something in front of him. After him, with gigantic strides, galloped a huge figure clad in white, with brown upperworks. He had something that stuck out straight behind him like a rudder. Those who had field-glasses discovered this to be a portion of his shirt. It was Goop, and he fired his rifle from the hip, but as his speed affected his aim, he could not bring down his target. Some of the words that the pursuer shouted came down the wind to the gallery of watchers.

"I gotcha, I gotcha, lie down, gol durn yuh! Hold up there, or I'll perferate yuh."

Unexpectedly the pursued swung about and his pistol cracked peevishly. Unfortunately, at that precise moment, Goop's bolt refused to work, a sign that his rifle was empty, and here the German was shooting at him. Possibly the German had been trying to load his pistol all the time and had but now succeeded. Be that as it may, Goop executed a right-about and proceeded in the opposite direction, losing no time and hitting only the elevations in his course. The German followed him, crying to him to halt, and yapping at him with the pistol. The pistol jammed or ran out of ammunition or something else happened to it, and at once the German turned and ran again.

"Hey, Goop!" howled every one. "Hey, hey, he's runnin' again. Go after him, Goop!"

Goop halted and looked around, then turned and dashed in pursuit of the fleeing German. Both of them passed out of sight on the other side of the ridge and the army went to work once more.

That was the beginning of the end. The mist had cleared away and it was broad day by now, as light as any one would want, so the Americans sent up a balloon or two and began systematically to smoke the Germans out with artillery of all calibers. Across the creek, just south of the Apremont-Mont Sec road was a patch of woods and many of the Germans took shelter in it. Those woods made a fine target. They were sprayed with shrapnel, shattered with high explosive, and searched through and through by rifle and machine-gun fire. Woods are bad places to take refuge in, because the shells tear off tree limbs and knock the trees themselves over, all of which is bad for those beneath.

No one was surprized, then, when quite a crowd of Germans came out to the edge of the woods and waved what looked to be a table-cloth or a sheet—where they got it was a mystery—as a sign of surrender. The firing ceased after a time, and the Germans began to move across the open space, marching in a compact mass, a goodly crowd of them. Every machine gun and rifle in the sector was trained on them and their co-ordinates went back to the artillery, so that in case they made a false move, they might immediately be flattened out.

THESE Germans were observed by others than the Americans. The progress of the attack had been watched since daylight by the Germans in the concrete observatories on Mont Sec and when they saw the surrender of the men in the woods, the watchers did some telephoning. What appeared to be several loads of coal was dumped without warning among the Germans marching across the plain and a dense black cloud of smoke arose. When it had cleared, nothing was to be seen but many dead, and a few living running for their lives. After that all resistance ceased. The Germans rose up where they were, as mild as lambs, held up their hands and surrendered to the first man that came their way.

The two machine guns that had broken the attack ceased firing. There were no targets any longer and there were many Americans in the field of fire. The sergeant sent a man down to bring number two back to its original position. The gun came, borne by its panting crew, the latter very eager to converse with the man who had been captured and had escaped with the loss of his shoes.

"Say," asked the sergeant suddenly, "how'd you happen to get captured?"

The man inspected the German boots that he now wore.

"Well," he said, rather bashfully, "I was lookin' for a Luger and them two birds jumped up an' grabbed me. They had their guns on me before I could say 'boo!' What could I do?"

He told of the landing of the one-pounder shell. One of his captors was hit and the Yank seized the opportunity to sock the other one upon the jaw, after which the Yank returned to his own lines.

"Did ye shoot 'em?" inquired one of the listeners.

"I could of, but they give me a cigaret when we was in the first shell-hole and they was good guys, after all. They was just young lads. I didn't have nothin' against 'em."

"Where's Goop?" asked another of the men.

"Lord knows," answered the sergeant. "He run off over the horizon, chasing a Jerry. Now you birds go slow on kiddin' him when he shows up, if he does, and don't get him riled until we can get the doctor to him. He's got shell-shock or something. He's gone crazy. Did you ever see anything like him runnin' around and yellin' like that?"

"I don't think he's crazy," said a gunner. "Yuh gotta have brains to be crazy."

At this moment Goop appeared, looking as pleased with himself as it is possible for a man clad in his underwear to look. An embarrassed silence fell upon the group.

"There," remarked Goop, grounding his rifle, "I guess that's over with. Now," he continued, gazing calmly about, "I'd like some pants and then I think I could make out a meal."

"I don't know where we can get you a pair of breeches," said the sergeant, gently, "you're so much longer than we are."

"I suppose I might as well put on my own," decided Goop. "They can dry out on me. It's warm now, and I won't mind it."

Goop went off in the direction of the sap that led to the dugout. On his way into the trench he met the absent MacAfee, returning in triumph, bearing his sheaves in the shape of steak and onions for the garrison's combined dinner and breakfast. Goop hastened to dress and rejoined his comrades in a surprizingly short time.

The gunners ate gleefully, now and then casting a curious eye at Goop. The reaction from the strain of the attack and their sleepless night had not yet set in and they gleefully recounted their adventures and displayed their spoils.

They had a great many silver rings, with red, white and black stripes on the part that went around the finger, each gunner had half a dozen pistols, they had letters, diaries, pictures, flashlights, shoulder-straps, belts, and those identification tags made of soft lead, that could be broken in half, one-half staying on the body, the other half being nailed to whatever was put up as headstone.

"What d'yuh suppose that 'Hindenburg Oppeln' on these tags means?" asked one of the men.

None of them knew, not even Reinhardt.

"Maybe it's the name of the traveling circus that pulled off the attack," suggested the sergeant.

Here Goop gave a slight moan.

"What's the matter Goop?" asked every one at once.

"I'm wonderin' whose to bury all them Jerries," said Goop sadly. "I been sittin' here countin' and I can count a hundred and twenty-eight from here."

This was indeed a sad thought and one that had not occurred before.

"We better get at it right after chow," said the sergeant. "This hot sun is likely to make 'em pretty ripe by the time we get done."

"First, though," said Goop, "I'd like for you to give me a coupla hours off, Johnny, I got suthin I got to do."

"Sure," the sergeant replied, to humor the crazy man, "take all the time you want. What you got to do?"

"I got to go over to the town and knock the tar outta that mail orderly."

When Goop had gone the gunners looked around at each other solemnly.

"He's sure gone off his nut complete," they decided, and went on with their meal, relieved that Goop was gone and that all danger of his mistaking them for Germans and cutting loose was past.

GOOP went up the duck-boards, trying hard to keep up his courage. The excitement and the mental drunkenness that had kept him going all morning was rapidly wearing off. He trembled to think of the chances he had taken in rushing around after the Germans. And when he had been at the gun! Suppose a grenade had blown off his leg!

"I'll bet I ketch my death o' cold runnin' around like that with no clothes on," muttered Goop.

Whatever had induced him to make that wild threat that he was going to lick the mail orderly! The mail orderly was big and very knobby. Goop saw no prospect of being the victor in a fistic encounter, and if he lost, farewell all the prestige he had gained by his work of the morning. Whether this would really have happened or not is doubtful, but Goop feared that it would. Goop sat him down on an old sentry step to think. If he went on he would be disgraced and if he went back without licking the mail orderly, he would be doubly so. There was no middle way.

The guardian of fools whispered in his ear. Goop smiled.

"Ain't that good!" cried he aloud. "Why didn't I think of that before!"

He arose and went forward with a light heart.

The mail orderly hung out at regimental headquarters in Rambucourt, a town about five or six kilometers directly in the rear. He would come up each day to Xivray, a smaller town, that was directly on the front line and where the machine gunners' kitchens were. Goop's plan was to go to Xivray at a time when he knew the mail orderly would be still in Rambucourt and pretend to hunt for said mail orderly, with murderous intent. Of course he would not be able to find him and he could then return to his comrades and say that the mail orderly was hiding out.

So with a light heart Goop went to Xivray.

"I'm lookin' fer the mail orderly," he replied to numerous questions. "I got a crow to pick with him."

To the exclamations and approbations of those who had witnessed his hunting of the Boche, he turned a deaf ear.

"I ain't got no time to talk," he said darkly. "I got business to perform."

Alas for the plan. A friend of the mail orderly's, a dispatch rider, hailed Goop.

"How bad d'yuh want to see him?" he asked. "If yuh want to see him real bad, he'll be up with the mail in about half a hour. I'll tell him you're lookin' fer him. He'll fix yuh so's you won't be able to look fer any one fer the next month!"

The dispatch rider gave a heave to his machine, mounted it and raised a cloud of dust down the road to Ramboucourt. Goop felt sick. He had never thought of that ending to his scheme. Now indeed, he had upset the beans. He had thrown down the gage of combat and there would be no retreat. Goop ceased his search abruptly and went to where his comrades slumbered in the dugout. MacAfee, who had been left on guard, called to him.

"Go to bed if you want to, Goop," he called. "They all fell asleep on their feet. Did yuh lick him?"

"Sure," said Goop.

No sleep for Goop. He was but a simple soul and the thought that he had taken many, many lives that day lay heavily upon him. He was tired and weary and dispirited.

"Ain't war turrible!" he muttered to himself continually. "Ain't war turrible!"

The day wore on, the shadows lengthened, time for stand-to approached. It is a very common thing for the victors of a small skirmish, or even of the first day or so of a drive, to think that the war is over, that they can stop a while and rest. Not so. The war still raged and the observatories on Mont Sec were still doing business.

When the shells began to clang, MacAfee aroused the sergeant and the weary gunners. They went out into the trench, but Goop remained in his bunk.

"Here's the mail," called one of them.

Goop tried to huddle into a smaller bundle. His heart beat very rapidly and his hands and face were quite cold. The hour of his unmasking was near. But who was that talking? A new and strange voice. Goop cautiously crept out and peered around a corner of the sap.

"There won't be no mail today," said the newcomer. "I'm getting casualty reports. Is there a P. C. around here?"

Goop straightened his helmet, arched his chest, and went out among his fellows.

"I told yuh I knocked that orderly for a gool," he said.

The newcomer grinned and his eye catching that of the sergeant's, the lid flickered ever so slightly.

"Come here," said the sergeant in a puzzled voice, "Goop isn't all there, you know. He went nuts this morning and we've been trying to get a doctor up here to take care of him. What did he do to the mail orderly?"

The stranger grinned once more.

"Why, he didn't do nuthin'. Goop went over to Xivray and sounded off he wanted to cut this guy's heart out. Well, after the scrap was over and you could get through the barrage, the word kept comin' down to Rambucourt that Goop was crazy and had run around beatin' Germans to death with a club. Then a dispatch rider curves in and says Goop is in Xivray layin' for the mail orderly and that he said he'd business with him. The mail orderly fades after that."

"What do you mean, 'fades'?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said the man, winking, "if he was so scared of Goop that he caught a truck an' went over the hill."

THE CAMP FIRE

A Meeting Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOME more data on the effect of bites from tarantulas, scorpions and so on:

Vancouver, B. C.

I have been reading in "Camp-Fire" about the tarantula and its deadly effects on humans. Perhaps an incident which occured in 1898 on the Nile Expedition may be of interest to some of your readers.

AT A camp which we named "Darmarle" where we waited for Nile rising to get the gunboats over the cataracts, a man of the 10th Regiment was bitten on or about the spine by a tarantula during the night and was taken to the hospital tent, but in spite of medical attention he died about sunset next evening (or about 18 hours after being bitten) in great agony. I believe they sent for an old sheik to see if he could do anything, but he said it was too late, but if they had sent for him before the man took convulsions he could have saved him.

A sergeant of my own regiment and company the following night set up a yell and said he had been bitten. We searched around, stripped off his clothes, but could not find anything but a beetle, one of the beetles which many of Camp-Fire readers have seen, very industriously pushing a ball of mud ahead of them. Well, he swore he had been bitten by a tarantula. Possibly he had and it got away, but he died the following day, whether from tarantula, fear or worn out I could not say. We were all pretty nearly all in.

IN THAT part of the desert the spiders were very thick and some of them had bodies as large as a duck's egg and legs up to four inches long. I have seen men stung with scorpions and centipedes but apart from the pain and swelling they did not seem any the worse for it. I might mention I was stung by a scorpion myself on the big toe in India. He happened to be in the bottom of the bed when I got in at the top. I simply tied the toe tightly and, bar a little swelling, a pain for an hour to two, was none the worse for it. Possibly a man in bad health and full of fever would have had a hard time to get over a sting from a big scorpion, but I do not think a healthy man would suffer from it any more than I did myself or several other men I have seen stung.

Am simply stating facts from my own experience. My advice is to treat all those gentlemen with a club and take no chances.—H. G. L.

SOMETHING from Howard E. Morgan about his story in this issue and about himself.

Schenectady, N. Y.

I have a habit—bad one probably—of piecing together the scenery to fit the story. In "The Big Little Man" for instance;—in writing of Bald Mountain, I'm quite sure I had in mind Blue Mountain in the Adirondacks, and Roaring Brook—Roaring Brook in the Green Mountains, near Arlington, Vermont. Minerva City might be almost any small Western town. The whole, although forming a bit of country that never existed in toto, is nevertheless, very real to me.

YOU ask me for a brief wheeze regarding my adventures, etc. After having read dozens of these letters in *Adventure*, each of them containing more actual adventure in one line that I might manufacture in many pages, I, at this moment, register an unmistakable case of cold feet. I'm as egotistical as the next, but, the way I figure it, the place to emulate the clam is among your friends, your friends who know you, or, if they don't, —— soon will. Shoot your mouth off—if you will—among other blowhards. I consider the Camp-Fire folks my friends. I have not had many adventures, certainly nothing worth while recounting to such a notable gathering. If I was sitting among you, I would probably listen, listen very hard; perhaps I might be able to tell you a story, but as for foisting any of my own uninteresting experiences on you—no—I wouldn't do it.

Statistically, I am thirty-two years of age and probably one of the most ordinary mutts in the world. Absolutely the only claims to distinction that I make, are my wife and nine-year-old youngster, than which no finer may be found on this broad earth. And oh yes, a small automobile, vintage of 1921 that so far has got me wherever I wanted to get. Of course I like the out-of-doors. Mountains preferred to the ocean. Skiing is my favorite sport. I like the cold Winter. Eskimo blood somewhere, I guess. I am all soured up from April to October. As soon as the cold weather comes—"Richard is himself again."—Howard E. Morgan.

OUR thanks to Dr. Charles Stuart Bowman for an interesting bit of frontier history.

Some day we'll have to get together on the work of defining Camp-Fire's idea of an adventurer. So far as I can see, we use the word in the broadest sense and include under it all who leave the beaten track and, for whatever reason and in whatever capacity, fare forth "where things happen" or where there is this, that or the other to be done by a man who can stand on his own two feet, think with his own head and act with his own hands. He may be only a wanderer seeking new sights or excitement, but he may also be doctor, scientist, engineer, missionary, soldier, sailor or emissary of trade.

Philadelphia.

Camp-Fire: May a new tillicum come forward from the shadows and join the circle in the firelight? I can not say that I am an adventurer except that I have wandered over the globe, first as a surgeon on steamers in the seven seas, then in the Army for 25 years and placed on the shelf with a bad pump. Have served in Cuba, Philippines, China and Alaska, with the little scrap at Vera Cruz thrown in as good measure. Marked time and taught the young idea how to shoot at a Base Hospital near Chicago during the last unpleasantness (much to my regret, as I sure wanted to be in the "muss" on the other side). Have been under fire in all the places mentioned except Alaska and bear two honorable scars.

My joining the circle is with the idea of lifting my voice concerning David Morgan's fight with two Indians in West Virginia. In this connection I inclose an extract from "Our Western Border One Hundred Years Ago," p. 385 ff, by Charles McKnight (J. C. McCurdy, Phila., 1876). Hope that this may prove interesting to the members of our circle.—Bowman.

"DAVID MORGAN, a relation of the celebrated General Daniel Morgan, had settled upon the Monongahela during the early part of the Revolutionary War, and at this time had ventured to occupy a cabin at a distance of several miles from any settlement. One morning, having sent his younger children out to a field at a considerable distance from the house, he became uneasy about them and repaired to the spot where they were working, armed, as usual, with a good rifle. While sitting upon the fence, and giving some directions concerning the work, he observed two Indians upon the other side of the field, gazing earnestly upon the party. He instantly called to the children to make their escape, while he should attempt to cover their retreat.

"The odds were greatly against him, as, in addition to other circumstances, he was nearly seventy years of age, and, of course, unable to contend with his enemies in running. The house was more than a mile distant, but the children, having two hundred yards the start and being effectually covered by their father, were soon so far in front that the Indians turned their attention entirely to the old man. He ran, for several hundred yards, with an activity which astonished himself, but perceiving that he would be overtaken long before he could reach his home, he fairly turned at bay and prepared for a strenuous resistance. The woods through which they were running were very thin and consisted almost entirely of small trees, behind which it was difficult to obtain proper shelter.

"WHEN Morgan adopted the above resolution he had just passed a large walnut, which stood like a patriarch among the saplings which surrounded it, and it became necessary to run back about ten steps in order to regain it. The Indians became startled at the sudden advance of the fugitive and were compelled to halt among a cluster of saplings, where they anxiously strove to shelter themselves. This, however, was impossible, and Morgan, who was an excellent marksman, saw enough of the person of one of them to justify him in risking a shot. His enemy instantly fell, mortally wounded. The other Indian, taking advantage of Morgan's empty gun, sprang from his shelter and advanced rapidly upon him. The old man, having no time to reload his gun, was compelled to fly the second time. The Indian gained upon him rapidly and, when within twenty steps, fired, but, with so unsteady an aim that Morgan was totally unhurt, the ball having passed over his shoulder.

"He now again stood at bay, clubbing his rifle for a blow; while the Indian, dropping his empty gun, brandished his tomahawk and prepared to throw it at his enemy. Morgan struck with the butt of his gun and the Indian whirled his tomahawk at one and the same moment. Both blows took effect. and both were wounded and disarmed. The breech of the rifle was broken against the Indian's skull, and the edge of the tomahawk was shattered against the barrel of the rifle, having first cut off two fingers of Morgan's left hand. The Indian then attempted to draw his knife; Morgan grappled him and bore him to the ground. A furious struggle ensued, in which the old man's strength failed and the Indian succeeded in turning him.

"PLANTING his knee on the breast of his enemy, and yelling loudly, as usual with them on any turn of fortune, he again felt for his knife in order to terminate the struggle at once; but having lately stolen a woman's apron and tied it about his waist, his knife was so much confined that he had great difficulty in finding the handle. Morgan, in the meantime, being a regular pugulist, according to the custom of Virginia, and perfectly at home in a ground struggle, took advantage of the awkwardness of the Indian and got one of the fingers of his right hand between his teeth. The Indian tugged and roared in vain, struggling to extricate it. Morgan held him fast, and began to assist him in hunting for the knife. Each seized it at the same moment, the Indian by the blade and Morgan by the handle, but with a very slight hold.

"The Indian, having the firmest hold, began to draw the knife further out of its sheath, when Morgan gave his fingers a furious bite, twitched the knife dexterously through his hand, cutting it severely. Both now sprang to their feet, Morgan brandishing his adversary's knife and still holding his finger between his teeth. In vain the poor Indian struggled to get away, rearing, plunging and bolting like an unbroken colt. The teeth of the white man were like a vise and he at length succeeded in giving him a stab in the side. The Indian received it without falling, the knife having struck his ribs; but a second blow aimed at the stomach proved more effectual and the savage fell. Morgan thrust the knife, handle and all, into the cavity of the body, directed it upward and, starting to his feet, made the best of his way home.

"The neighborhood was quickly alarmed and, hurrying to the spot where the struggle had taken place, they found the first Indian lying where he had fallen, but the second had disappeared. A broad trail of blood, however, conducted to a fallen treetop within one hundred yards of the spot, into which the poor fellow had dragged himself and where he now lay, bleeding but still alive. He had plucked the knife from his wound and was endeavoring to dress it with the stolen apron—which had cost him his life—when his enemies approached. He greeted them with what was intended for an ingratiating smile, held out his hand, and exclaimed, in broken English 'How de do, broder? How de do? Glad to see you!' But, poor fellow! the love was all on his side. Their brotherhood extended only to tomahawking, scalping and skinning him, all of which operations were performed within a few minutes after the meeting. To such an extent had mutual injury inflamed both parties."

AND so there's a copy of *Adventure* under the tomb of Tamerlane! Unless, of course, some adventurer has taken it away for his own purposes. Let us hope he hasn't, for Tamerlane is certainly entitled to a copy. If some one did remove it, however, he has probably earned a prize for citing the strangest place in which a copy of our magazine has been found.

Also, here's paging Gabriel Schaffer, world wanderer:

> If at any time you have a line to spare, I might ask if you could insert a broadcast for information regarding Gabriel Schaffer, a world wanderer. I met him in the early part of 1914 crossing Kara Kum and was with him a couple of days, when on reaching Askerbad our ways divided and I left him there in the company of two charming ladies. I received several letters from him on getting back to Batum and wrote him to Archangel, but never got any reply. Maybe he got lost in the shuffle over there which broke out shortly after.
>
> The opening of the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamen brings into my mind that under the tomb of Tamerlane there is (or was) a copy of *Adventure* which I placed there, well covered up in a crevice, in April, 1914. Wonder if at some distant date it will be discovered and what the future generation will think of the old magazine.—EDWARD R. PARRY.

ALTHOUGH the story in this issue is not his first, Chester T. Crowell follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself.

> I was born October 12, 1888, in Cleveland, Ohio, the first child of Mr. and Mrs. W. T. Crowell. He was at that time star pitcher on the Cleveland nine. He was a baseball player until 1897, when he made his last appearance as player, manager and I believe owner or part owner of the Houston, Texas, team of the Texas League.
>
> MY PARENTS moved to New Orleans when I was a very small youngster and later to other parts of that state and Texas, where I went to school when the notion struck me, but principally played "hooky" in order to get time to read good books. My boyhood included several runnings away from home each of which I thought was "for keeps." I

always wanted to earn my own living and conduct my education according to my own ideas. I had such a deep hatred of being under the direction of a woman school teacher that I seldom lasted more than two months in any school without being "canned" temporarily or permanently.

AT SIXTEEN years of age in the second year of high school I struck once and for all and went to work on the *Daily Express*, of San Antonio, Texas. This opportunity came to me because I had won several prizes for essays and one attracted the attention of a printer who knew the city editor of the paper. I "made good" and later at one time or another held every job on the paper with the exception of managing editor. I became restless finally and went to Mexico City as a reporter on the *Mexico Daily Record*, an afternoon newspaper published in English. I had been there two months when the managing editor of the *Mexican Herald*, the morning newspaper published in English, sent for me and put me on his staff at an increase in salary.

I was later news editor of that paper and made a wide acquaintance in Mexico. I have written several articles dealing with conditions in that country for American magazines and newspapers. I returned to become Sunday editor of the San Antonio *Express* and was later editorial writer. I left there to become managing editor of *The Daily Statesman* of Austin where I remained two years, the longest time I ever lived in one city.

I WROTE short stories in school and when I first started in the newspaper game. Sometimes when I am lacking a plot I dig up one of those old yellow manuscripts and rewrite it. Only two or three of them are left now. I sold the first story I ever wrote to *Harper's Weekly*.

A FACT of no importance about my life which I find frequently interests people is that the only snow I remember seeing was on Mount Popocatepetl near the City of Mexico. This is one of the high mountains of the world and in climbing it I went above the snow line. In the years that furnished experiences I can remember I have never been north of Dallas, Texas, and only one time have I visited that city which is about 600 miles north of San Antonio where I now live.

I have covered Latin-America fairly well and like those countries. I learned Spanish well enough in three months to translate legal documents and find no need of an interpreter. It required about three hours of study a day and residence in a cheap Spanish boarding house in the City of Mexico where not a word of English was spoken.

LIKE most writers I have a hobby or "bug" on the trouble with the entire social fabric of the United States in particular and the world in general. It is my aim in life to work out my plan some day. I think nearly every trouble we have can be cured by equalizing the density of population; there are too many people in some places and not enough in other places. My idea for effecting the needed change is a corporation to buy large tracts of land and sell them to settlers for one dollar down and forty years to pay the rest with about five per cent. interest on the principal, the theory being that no money can be lost because land values are the safest values on earth.

When I have time I am going to Congress to work for a law to make enlistment in the Army for a term of one year and have the minimum age brought down to about sixteen years and make the Army posts schools as well as posts so that the Army will always offer to the boys who can not get an education any other way an opportunity along that line. The lack of rural schools in this country and the low standards of those we have are a grave national problem.—CHESTER T. CROWELL.

THIS, a letter of 1921, brought forth from our Camp-Fire cache, seems warrant for breaking our rule against printing praise of the magazine:

West Homestead, Pennsylvania.

If I was to tell some people that I have seen a man unload a half of a railroad car of ice for a quarter (25c or 2 bits) and go blow that selfsame precious 2-bits piece for the latest copy of *Adventure*, well, they would say "He's nuts" or "He's crazy as ——!" But they don't know, that's all. More than once I have spent the last quarter I have had, and considered it well spent, on the magazine.—J. GEO. GESSNER.

PRINTING the following in "Camp-Fire" is equivalent to broadcasting a request for general riots, but, as I may be in South America when it appears, I'm taking a chance. Or, rather, I hope to be where I'll not have to take any chances. In any case, remember *I* didn't say anything on either side of the question. I'm standing from under—and leaving the country before the riots start.

Which is also a roundabout way of reminding you not to hold it against me if I don't answer letters that come in while I'm away.

Galeras, Olancho, Honduras, C. A.

Reading an old *Adventure* an hour or so ago, I saw where I had tried to tell the Camp Firers how to shoot—from a dub's standpoint. I neglected an important matter, so, if you will let me stand up for five minutes I shall say my little piece.

RIFLE shooting is an operation which calls for man's best vision. The better the vision, all else being equal, the better the shot. That looks like an axiom, doesn't it? I hardly imagine any one would care to take the negative in an argument.

As a *medico*, I have a fair working knowledge of the mechanics of vision. I assert that, with the average normal eye, the best possible point of vision is when the head is erect and the central ray of light from the object to the retina makes a right angle with the cross diameters thereof. Plainly stated: A man must be looking squarely at the object.

Again as a medico, I assert that two eyes are better than one, even should one of them be a sheep's eye.

THESE points being admitted, then, would some of the other dubs, or even an expert, who is not too busy experting, explain to my limited understanding just why we are told to twist our beans to one side and thus see the object at an angle? Then, having explained this, would he kindly aid me more by explaining why I should further handicap my vision by shutting off half of it?

Being, as I have admitted, a rank dub and no expert, naturally I shoot with my head up and both eyes open, looking at the thing I want to hit, and strange to say—contravening orders in such a silly way—I hit it oftener than the most of the expert-taught ones do. Now that looks all wrong. Why should it be? The experts *must* be right; *but*, are they? Furthermore, *who* says they are experts? Most of them only think they are. I don't. Any one who tells me that a man can see better with his head cocked and one lamp shut off can easily hear what I think.

Man shows his reason by amending his opinions as his knowledge increases.

THE first shooter may have had a squint or an astigmatism or something, and he may have been a one-eyed man at that. That would have been quite enough to create a precedent, and as we are prone to follow the fellow who loudly asserts he knows best, sheeplike we have followed his lead.

Now that we know that two eyes beat one—visually, that is, why not apply that knowledge and revise our antiquated and fossilized idea about shooting? Or should we carry on by the text book, whether or no? I'm open to conviction and the voice of wisdom. Let it orate, please. Maybe some of the experts can show me where I am all wrong, and that I don't know a darned thing about the human eye and its function. Like enough, for what we yesterday thought we knew, today we are certain we didn't.

JUST, for instance, suppose you other dubs try a time or two with your head up, both eyes open and fixed on the object. Forget the sights altogether. They will show up, never fear. You'll see the nice little spot of the front sight apparently on the object. *But* remember to forget the rifle altogether. Think only of the object and look only at it. Then when you see that spot where you want it, pull the pin and tell me what happened.

If any of the experts get hot under the collar over this, let them take the collar off and fan like all possessed. I won't fight, that's sure.

Yours in fear and trembling.—W. C. ROBERTSON.

WHAT is behind the Swain story in this issue as told by Arthur D. Howden Smith.

This story of "Swain's Chase" is another episode in the feud between Swain Olaf's son and Olvir Rosta. It comes after the story of the final duel between Swain and Olvir because some of you wanted to hear more about Swain. In writing about him at first I was embarrassed by a wealth of material, and inasmuch as this story fared far afield from the Orkneys I put it aside, electing to localize the setting of those early stories as much as possible. Almost everything in the story is based upon saga fact, incidents either in the life of Swain or of some other worthy. For instance, Haraold Haardraade crossed the Golden Horn boom as I made Swain do it. The principal persons are all real, and all drawn from actual descriptions of them in the sagas. If there is any ulterior or underlying theme in "Swain's Chase" it is the importance of the part played by the skalds in the life of the time. It would be hard to overrate it.

IT WAS written back in April, 1922, and things, particularly in C. A., do change, but most of this letter doesn't lose its interest with age. It was written to Edgar Young, by a comrade who wanted A.A. advice before starting on the trip in question, to say thank you for said advice and to report on latest conditions at that time. Mr. Linnehan has the true Camp-Fire spirit. He got information that proved of value; in return he reported conditions as he found them, thus helping Mr. Young keep in close touch with his territory and make him all the better able to give the same kind of helpful advice to the next comrade who came along.

Just as you readers help us in the large task of holding our fiction as close as possible to correct setting and color, just so you help in making our "Ask Adventure" service more and more valuable to comrades in general.

Newport News, Virginia.

Having returned from my trip to Honduras, I thought probably you would like to hear how things appear in your old stamping ground to a visitor of the present day.

I left New Orleans May 30, 1921, on the Guyamel *S.S. Nicardo*, my partner and I being the only passengers. At New Orleans we were required to get a sailing permit from the U. S. Customs Department; a passport from the Hondurun Consul ($2); get vaccinated and vaccination certificate ($2), before buying ticket, which cost $40 plus $3 war tax.

We were told by the ship's captain we would not get our two rifles or ammunition in (2,400 rounds 30-30, 38, 22) without a permit from the capitol and that the U. S. Minister would be the one for us to appeal to.

WE TIED to the fruit company's dock at Puerto Cortes at 2 A.M. and left the ship with the custom inspector at 7, our baggage being carried by two natives. When I started to open my trunk, the inspector called for two dollars for the carriers, I asked, "*Plata, Señor?*" He replied, "*Oro,*" and when I handed it over he told us our stuff was all O.K.—he never saw the rifles.

WE LEFT Cortes at 8 A.M. for San Pedro Sula, 36 miles west, fare $1.50, time 4 hours, 15 minutes, the roughest trip I had in Honduras; I prefer a saddle or a pack-mule.

The church and other buildings at San Pedro are roofed with galvanized iron and I gave up trying to count the bullet-holes in the church roof.

Pack and saddle animals are high—if you go inland you can get them cheaper, but they are so wild I wouldn't risk them, as the trails themselves are, in my opinion, the most dangerous things there, as I learned when I ran into a head-on pack-train on a one-horse trail along a cliff between San Pedro and Santa Cruz. I finally bought two pack-mules for $110.

Mozos (guides) get $10 per month, but I could not get one to go where I wanted to go (up the Chimelicon to the Salada, then south along that river. In fact, I never met any one there who knew of any Rio Salada where it was shown on my map. So after trying for some time I was forced to recognize the fact that where I wanted to go was one thing and where I could go, in the probable length of life left me, was another.

WE WERE both offered work at our trade by the Dorr Const. Co. (U. S.) who were building a sugar mill at Le Limar; my partner went to work while I roamed the trails as far as Los Minos. I visited Mrs. Porter on the foot hills at San Pedro; Mrs. Borosso on the bank of the Chimelicon, where I had a ticklish time fording the rapid river.

I handled all kinds of mineral ore, most of it looking like soft black and brown rock, until you try to lift it when you find you have hold of something mighty heavy.

I panned gold from nearly every stream I tried, even from a spring—just a color but proof that colors can be found most anywhere. Still, placer mining is being discarded for vein mining by the old-timers with good results. I wish I could remember the names of the old-time prospectors I went with down there—old Tom; 20 years on the trails, and another 33 years, bow-legged and stoop-shouldered from riding—not much to say until they know and trust you—probably not much money but courage and hope eternal. It is a rough life at its best. Men from the Philippines will find traveling the trails in Honduras alone is quite different from hiking over the P. I. trails with more or less of an army of friends.

BY THE way I never had any use for my mosquito net at San Pedro or further in; more mosquitos here in Virginia than I ever saw there; probably bad near the coast. Never boiled any drinking water. It comes down from those hills in great force and springs are pure and numerous (away from habitation).

My greatest annoyance was ants, ants everywhere—and drunken natives on the trails trying to imitate Sitting Bull in the War Dance.

I STUDIED the country, the natives and the possible chances and I have faith in the last—my only regret is my ignorance of geology and mineralogy, which is the greatest defect in all the old prospectors I met. They know when they get hold of mineral ore, but know nothing of its composite parts, its value or the amount or value of the mine as a whole and I suppose the only way they can ascertain same is to send sample to U. S. for treatment, which costs money and it seems few have that.

I HADN'T been in a saddle for twenty years and my first ride of 36 miles crippled me for two or three weeks—36 miles is considered a fair day's ride. Those little mules are wonderfully strong and surefooted. Many a time I inspected a trail on foot, to see if any mule had ever made it before and although I fell several times myself, my little mule never slipped or stumbled until I, being nervous, tried to guide him away from his selected path on the edge of the cliff—about three hundred feet drop.

I made the acquaintance of two small S. A. tigers and saw the skins of quite a number for sale by the natives. I was surprized to find such a large animal of that species there (ringed like a leopard, but a big fellow just the same). Saw deer, very plentiful; wild hogs, wild turkeys, macaws, parrots, large and varied colored lizards, all sizes. Did not see a jaguar or the animal called the mountain cow by the old trailers. I heard what I believe true stories of ground snakes 13 feet long, harmless, and of two little fellows very deadly. Also saw enough and to spare of that repulsive vulture the Honduras buzzard. Will I ever be able to forget them? I kept away from the alligator swamps. I am not on speaking terms with those boys and a piece of drift against my legs when fording rivers made me increase speed.

I WILL leave here again next Summer, going to the coast, probably Tela, then inland to Juticalpa, where I will make flying trips, a few days at a time, traveling light from the last railroad or river steamer terminal—saddle mule only, hammock, blanket, pouch, underwear and socks, guns and ammunition and a little food strapped to saddle. When I find a place I wish to work or a good base away from habitation, I will come in to nearest place, buy and pack a mule and go in with supplies.

I can, if necessary, abandon my saddle-mule for a time to inspect unknown gulleys, cliffs and ravines where no mule can go, but this can not be done with loaded pack-animals.

I believe I can go farther in less time and at less expense by this plan, as I have found a pack-train on bad trails or no trail at all is an impediment to free movement.

IT'S a gamble, we know, but the man with the proper kind of spirit will never regret the experience in this Chinese-puzzle land of mountains, whose mineral wealth has yet to be brought to light in all its richness.

I thank you for your advice and assistance so freely given when I was preparing for this trip. Mr. —— backed out at the last minute and Mr. —— took his place and is now working in the sugar mill at Le Limar.

I found three opals, one large, two small. Sold them to a college professor at San Pedro as I didn't want to pay duty on stone on arrival in U. S. without knowing the value of same. Quite a number can be picked up down there. Some are beautiful colors.

Please accept my regards and best wishes for your prosperity and happiness.—FRANK C. LINNEHAN.

P.S.—C. A. maps "mucho loco."

A YOUNG comrade, E. Schaller, of Milwaukee, back in 1921 wrote that he'd somewhere read an article stating that John Wilkes Booth, slayer of Lincoln, had recently died in Texas, confessing to the crime on his death-bed and saying a man resembling him had been hanged by mistake. The comrade asks whether there is any possibility that this can be true.

The report is interesting, but chiefly as an example of the extent to which rumor and a leaning toward romance and sensation can build from nothing. I, of course, do not know of my own knowledge that the real Booth was hanged, and many "impossible" things have happened, but there seems no chance of verity here.

To what extent is this report current and what started it?

OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading steadily over the map. Help make them grow.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

Arizona—200—Clifton. C. Hooker.
209—Quartzite. Buck Conner, Box 4.

Arkansas—161—Hot Springs. Tom Manning, Jr., 322 Morrison Ave.

California—28—Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, Cottage Inn.
38—Los Angeles, Colonel Wm. Strover, Westlake Military School, Mount Washington.
60—San Bernardino. Charles A. Rouse, Hotel St. Augustine.
73—Galt. E. M. Cook, Box 256.
74—Eagle Rock. John R. Finney, 109 Eddy Ave.
89—Chico. K. W. Mason, 1428 Park Ave.
108—Helendale. G. R. Wells, P. O. Box 17.
113—Vallejo. Edith G. Engesser, Golden Triangle Rabbitry, Highway Homes.
114—Mill Valley. Louis F. Guedet, Restawhyle Knoll.
115—Los Gatos. G. H. Johnson.
116—Sebastopol. Mrs. Lucy E. Hicks, 420 S. Main St.
126—Covelo. Whit H. Ham. Box 388.
141—Santa Cruz. A. W. Wyatt, Capitola Road and Jose Ave.
149—San Francisco. A. H. Hutchinson, Veteran Press, 1264 Valencia St.
186—Santa Ysabel. William Strover, Santa Ysabel Inn.
210—Berkeley. Dr. Louis C. Mullikin, 305 Acheson Bldg.
211—Pomona. Fred G. Sunley, 480 E. Alverado St.
212—Del Monte. Alex H. Sokoloff, 3rd Signal Co. R. O. T. C.
231—San Francisco. Earl V. Swift, 24-A Brady St.

Colorado—105—Grand Junction. Bart Lynch, 236 Main St.
176—Denver. Elmer S. Burrows, 3407 Larimer St.

Connecticut—103—New Haven. Ralph Pierson, 3 Yale Station.
142—Meriden. Homer H. Brown, 1 Colony Place.

Delaware—232—Delmar. J. A. Aniba, Stone House Hotel.

D. C.—167—Washington. Walter A. Sheil, 503 Sixth St, N.E.

Florida—87—Miami. A. C. Smith, 49 N. E. First St.
117—Miami. Miami Canoe Club, 115 S. W. South River Drive.
128—Titusville. Max von Koppelow, Box 1014.
139—St. Petersburg. Capt. Lee Whetstone, Hotel Poinsettia.
143—St. Petersburg. J. G. Barnhill, 10 Third St. N.
158—Crescent City. E. N. Clark, care *Call*.
188—Johnson. Clifford Martin.

Georgia—98—Hinesville. R. N. Martin, *The Liberty County Herald*.

Idaho—110—Pocatello. C. W. Craig, 223 S. Second Ave.

Illinois—47—Peoria. B. H. Coffeen.
66—Mt. Carmel. W. C. Carter, 1122 Chestnut St.
67—Plainfield. J. P. Glass, The Linshield Co.
189—Chicago. Herman A. Schell, 8708 Vincennes Ave.
213—Chicago. Pietro Ferraro, 1007 S. Peoria St.
237—Chicago. Wm. Churchill, 6541 S. State St.

Indiana—18—Connersville. Norba Wm. Guerin, 112 East Eighteenth St.
90—Linton. Herschell Isom, 73 Tenth St., N. E.
180—Warsaw. Homer Lewis.

Iowa—238—Atlantic. George Woodbury, 5 E Third St.

Kansas—228—Leavenworth. Ben H. Lukenbill, 315 Shawnee St.

Kentucky—144—Corbin. Keith Mauney.
190—Louisville. H. S. Summers, 421 W. Jefferson St.

Louisiana—191—Melville. Wm. P. Stephens.
202—New Orleans. W. Bailey, 1116 Iberville St., Cor. Basin.
228—St. Rose. C. M. Elfer.

Maine—19—Bangor. Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St.
59—Augusta. Robie M. Liscomb, 73½ Bridge St.
111—Lewiston. Howard N. Lary, 714 Main Street.

Maryland—55—Baltimore. Henry W. L. Fricke, 1200 E. Madison St., at Asquith.
82—Baltimore. Joseph Patti, Jr., 4014 E. Lombard St.
151—Williamsport. L. J. Schaefer. Frederick St.

Michigan—69—Grand Rapids. Dr. A. B. Muir, 1133 Lincoln Ave., N. W.
79—Lansing. Geo. H. Allen, *Lansing Industrial News*, 109½ N. Washington Ave.
106—Gaylord. Sidney M. Cook.
131—North Muskegon. James Fort Forsyth, Forsyth Publisher's Service, Phone 5891.
137—Flint. O'Leary & Livingston, 309 So. Saginaw St.
192—Pickford. Dr. J. A. Cameron, The Grand Theater.
227—Adrian. S. N. Cook, 221 Clinton St.

Minnesota—112—St. Paul. St. Paul *Daily News*, 92 E. Fourth St.
145—Brainerd. F. T. Tracey, care Brainerd Gas & Electric Co.

Mississippi—88—Tunica. C. S. Swann, Box 244.
99—Picayune. D. E. Jonson.

Missouri—51—St. Louis. W. R. Hoyt, 7921 Van Buren St., phone Riverside 250.
94—St. Louis. C. Carter Lee, M. D., 3819 Olive St.
127—Salem. Emmet C. Higgins, 100 N. Tenth St.

Montana—240—Fort Missoula, Company C, 4th Infantry.

Nebraska—95—Omaha. L. W. Stewart, 119 No. 16th St.
214—Tecumseh. Dr. C. F. Roh.

New Mexico—96—Silver City. Edward S. Jackson, Box 435.
203—Elephant Butte via Engle. Henry Stein.
229—Santa Fe. N. Howard Thorp, 103 Palace Ave.

New Jersey—17—Caldwell. Chas. A. Gerlard. Box 13.
164—Chatham. Roy S. Tinney.
91—Tenafly. Ed Stiles, P. O. Box 254.
146—Paterson. Charles S. Gall, 378 Dakota St.

New York—23—Jamestown. W. E. Jones, 906 Jefferson St.
34—New York City. St. Mary's Men's Club, 142 Alexander Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.
107—New York City. Bronx Division, U. S. Junior Naval Reserves, 3132 Webster Ave.

147—Youngsville. Harry Malowitz, Youngsville House.
165—Saratoga. Wm. Marshall, Office No. 9, Chamber of Commerce Arcade.
177—Brooklyn. George Iverson, 306 Macon St.
185—Brooklyn. J. M. Canavan, 69 Bond St.
193—Niagara Falls. Roy Tompkins, 1155 Garret Ave.
194—Hadley. Mrs Chas. H. Black.
204—Buffalo. Joseph T. Rozar, 198 Madison St.
205—Newburgh. Jacques Teller, 5 Golden St.
215—George's Sport Shop, 45 Main St., Yonkers.
226—Red Hook. P. W. E. Hart, The Silver Birch Shop, Albany Post Road, Dutchess Co.
233—Albany. R. N. Bradley, 84 Livingston Ave.
239—Brooklyn. Arthur Borchmann, 451 Rodney St.

North Carolina—133—Pine Bluff. N. Steve Hutchings.
159—Waynesville. Harry M. Hall, 720 Walnut St.
92—Biltmore. C. Marshall Gravatt, Felstone Co.

North Dakota—160—Fargo. James E. Cowan, Central Garage, rear Grand Theater.
206—Fairmount. Frank Kitchener, Richland Hotel.

Ohio—58—Cleveland. J. F. Thompson, Community Pharmacy, 9505 Denison Ave.
52—Ulrichsville. Anthony Sciarra, 329 W. Fourth St.
63—Ulrichsville. Chas. F. Burroway, 312 Water St.
75—Columbus. Chas. W. Jenkins, 54 S. Burgess Ave.
113—Buena Vista. Geo. T. Watters.
166—Toledo. Frank P. Carey, 3267 Maplewood Ave., or wherever his Ford happens to be.
207—Columbus. Tod S. Raper, 77 Taylor Ave.
241—Cincinnati. D. W. Davidson, 1414 Vine St.

Oklahoma—57—Haskell. Roy Holt.
225—Shawnee. A. M. Postlethwaite, 521 N. Beard St.
234—Blackwell. H. W. Willis, 204½ N. Main St.

Oregon—4—Salem. D. Wiggins.
187—Portland. W. J. Belduke, 29½ N. Ninth St.
216—Portland. Miss Billie Russell, 532 E. 19th St.

Pennsylvania—20—Philadelphia. Wm. A. Fulmer, 252 S. Ninth St.
21—Braddock. Clarence Jenkins, Union News Co.
24—Philadelphia. Alfred A. Krombach. 4159 N. Eighth Street, and Spring Mills Station, P. & R. Ry. Co., Montgomery County.
78—Pittsburgh. Peter C. Szarmach, 350 Harmer St.
100—Philadelphia. Veterans of Foreign Wars, 926 N. 41st St.
121—Philadelphia. Don L. Brown, 3444 D St.
152—Harrisburg. Mrs. L. H. Wistrand, Washington Heights, Lemoyne.
182—Greensburg. Don Frederick Wermuth.
224—Oil City. J. M. Blair, 608 W. Front St.

South Dakota—179—Fairburn. Jesse K. Fell, *Custer County Press.*

South Carolina—217—Charleston. J. H. Keener, 346 King St.
97—Charleston. J. W. Mette, Navy Yard.

Tennessee—195—Knoxville. C. G. Pruden, 2024 Rose Ave.

Texas—33—Houston. J. M. Shamblin, 4805 Oakland St.
123—San Juan. D. L. Carter, Box 436.
134—Breckenridge. Joe Randel, 226 Baylor Avenue.
135—Mexia. Charles O. Hurley, M. D.
148—Port Arthur. Ralph C. Cornwell, 215 Eighth St.
174—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West Eighth St.
183—South San Antonio. J. F. Nicodemus, Box 111, So. San Antonio Transfer.
218—Fort Worth. Robert Lentz, R No. 6 Box 73.
208—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West 8th St.

Utah—157—Salt Lake City. Ned Howard, 127 N. St.

Vermont—56—Fort Ethan Allen. E. Worth Benson, Box 10.

Virginia—108—Cape Charles. Lynn Stevenson, Custom House Building.
219—Richmond. Wm. Meek, 104 S. 1st St.

Washington—1—Ione. A. S. Albert, Albert's Billiard Hall.
61—Burlington. Judge B. N. Albertson, Fairhaven Ave.
83—Seattle. Chas. D. Raymer, Raymer's Old Book-Store, 1330 First Ave.
154—Mt. Vernon. Miss Beatrice Bell, Western Washington Auto Club.
155—Olympia. B. F. Hume, Commercial Club Rooms.
172—Sunnyside. Mark Austin.
196—Arlington. F. T. Herzinger.
220—Sultan. George W. Snyder, Main St., opp. Post Office.

West Virginia—48—Huntington. John Geiske, 1682 Sixth St.

Wisconsin—41—Madison. Frank Weston, 401 Gay Bldg.
5—Milwaukee. Paul A. Buerger, Apt. V, 1305 Cedar St.
138—Tomahawk Lake. Mrs. J. S. Hughson, Hughson's Resort.

Australia—39—Melbourne. William H. Turner, "Wolwoling" Keen St. Northcote; and Carters' and Drivers' Union, 46 William St.
76—Victoria. Chas. M. Healy, 30, The Avenue, Windsor Post, Dist. No. 8.
130—Brisbane. H. V. Shead, Sutton St., Kangaroo Pt.
235—Sydney. Phillip Norman, 842 Military Road, Nosman, Newtown.

Belgium—131—Antwerp. Reuben S. James, Place de l'Entrepot 3.

Bermuda—230—St. George's. Fred C. Taylor, Wainright Cottage.

British Columbia—231—Stewart. Jack O'Shea, Ryan Bldg.
236—Vancouver. A. Johnson, 552-3 Hastings St.

Canada—31—Howe Sound. C. Plowden, Plowden Bay.
84—White Rock, B. C. Charles L. Thompson.
22—Burlington, Ontario. T. M. Waumsly, Jocelyn Bookstore.
4—Dunedin, P. E. Island. J. N. Berrigan.
29—Deseronto, Ontario. Harry M. Moore, *The Post Weekly.*
45—Norwood, Manitoba. Albert Whyte, 84 La Riviere St.
30—Winnipeg, Man. Walter Peterson, 143 Kennedy St.
62—Woodstock, Ontario. George L. Catton, 94 Metcalfe St.
85—Oshawa, Ontario. J. Worral, 6½ King St. E.
102—Amherst, Nova Scotia. Lloyd E. MacPherson, 5 Belmont St.
124—Hartshorn, Alberta. Leonard Brown, 33-34-17 W4M.
178—Moncton. N. B. Chas. H. McCall, 178 St. George St.
221—Montreal East. M. M. Campbell, 95 Broadway.

Newfoundland—132—St. John's. P. C. Mars, Smallwood Bldg.

Canal Zone—37—Cristobal. F. E. Stevens.
156—Ancon. Arthur Haughton, Box 418.

China—222—Tientsin. Dr. George W. Twomey, 43 Rue de France.

Cuba—15—Havana. Ricardo N. Farres, Dominquez, 7 Cerro.
175—Miranda, Oriente. Volney L. Held.

Egypt—173—Khartoum, Sudany. W. T. Moffat, Sudan Customs.

Hawaiian Islands—170—Leilehua, Oahu, Château Shanty.

Honduras, C. A.—32—Galeras, Olancho. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson.
70—La Ceiba. Jos Buckly Taylor.

India—197—Calcutta. W. Leishman, 46 Wellesley St.

Mexico—68—Guadalajara, Jal. W. C. Money, Hotel Fenix, Calle Lopez, Cotilla Nos. 269 a 281.
136—Tampico, Tamps. Jack Hester, care of T. D. E. Humpo, Apartado 238.
223—Mazatlan, Sin. Paul L. Horn, Hotel de France, Apartado 102.

Navy—71—U. S. *Arizona.* Elmer E. McLean.
140—U. S. *Shawmut.* J. D. Montgomery.

Porto Rico—46—Ensenada. M. B. Couch, P. O. Box 5.

Philippine Islands—198—Manila. W. W. Weston, De La Rama Bldg.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4, 5. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
6, 7. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
8. Australia and Tasmania
9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
10. New Guinea
11. Philippine Islands
12. Hawaiian Islands and China
13. Japan
14—17. Asia. In Four Parts
18—25. Africa. In Eight Parts
26. Turkey and Asia Minor
27—29. Balkans. In Three Parts
30. Scandinavia
31. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
32. Great Britian
33—35. South America. In Three Parts
36. Central America
37, 38. Mexico. In Two Parts
39—45. Canada. In Seven Parts
46. Alaska
47. Baffinland and Greenland
48—53. Western U. S. In Six Parts
54—57. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
58—63. Eastern U. S. In Six Parts
Radio
Mining and Prospecting
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
Tropical Forestry
Aviation
Army Matters, United States and Foreign
American Anthropology North of Panama Canal
Standing Information

Personal

READERS have been asking for the autobiographies of "Ask Adventure" editors; and those staff members who believe that a few words about themselves will promote better acquaintanceship all around, are responding to the request. The order in which these autobiographies are printed doesn't signify anything. They are withdrawn from the file at random:

San Francisco, Calif.

How difficult it will be for me to broadcast the high and the low notes of this particular life. Many weeks now have I been putting this broadcasting off.

But tonight— I am playing from these little letters I sent Camp-Fire in the old, old days. And here and there taking a note or two from *our* own A. S. H.

A. S. H. Already I am quoting him. For it was far back in those quiet pre-Volstead days of 1916, a few quick months after I had gone to live and study in New York City, that he wrote in the number of *Adventure* which carried "Red Flannel," my first South Sea story, this introduction:

"Charles Brown, Jr., entering our pages this month for the first time, follows Camp-Fire custom and tells about himself and his tale. He was born in San Rafael, Calif., and after a succession of school work, tramping with hoboes through Utah, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, and newspaper work, one July morning he shipped out of San Francisco."

And where A. S. H. laid down his friendly pen I picked up the thread of my life story.

"Life on the sea is one —— plunge after another," I wrote. "The ship I was on plunged down and down and down into the South Seas, where she was wrecked off a lonely little island. She mixed it with a typhoon and took the count. As soon as I got out of the South Seas I sailed over to the Philippine Islands and into Manila. Here I went into the laundry business, running an opposition to Uncle Sam.

"I was broke all over, and needed money as badly as a horse needs shoes. So I appointed myself a committee of ways and means and went out to raise the necessary amount. Along the banks of the Pasig River I saw little groups of Filipino women washing their clothes. I took one look, and ran all the way back to the docks. Then I began to incubate my idea.

"I solicited the sailors for their laundry, emphasizing how cheaply it could be washed by the 'Pasig River Laundry.' With the first *carramato* load I hurried back to the river banks and hired the women to wash for me all day. That night the clothes were returned, the women paid, and I was flush again.

"After I left Manila on a transport, I made a beautiful passage through the China Sea. Most of the way I scrubbed deck. When the transport grew tired of running around northern China she turned and made a bee-line for Nagasaki, Japan. From there I sailed for home, where I found a big dinner cooked and the folks glad all over because the prodigal son had returned.

"After a seven months' preparatory course in San Francisco I matriculated at the University of California in 1912, and for the next three years specialized in social sciences and journalism. On September 1, 1915, I threw all my belongings into two suit-cases and left California, coming to New York City, where I am writing all day in a little garret-room and attending New York University at night. I am also doing social work in a settlement house."

In the months that ran so swiftly between the publication of "Red Flannel" and my second Camp-Fire letter I introduced to the wide, wide world a new kind of a highway man—the Lincoln Highway Man, or automobile hobo. In short, to quote the editor of *The World Magazine, New York Sunday World*, I "accomplished a necessary journey from Fort Wayne, Ind., to New York City, a distance of nearly 1,000 miles, over the Lincoln Highway, riding practically the whole distance in automobiles, at a total money expense of $1.55. Courtesy carried him through in just seven days."

But that second letter to Camp-Fire. It began this way: "On a hill in France. September 11, 1917."

A few weeks later, in a dugout far away in the Vosges Mountains, I wrote Camp-Fire as much as I dared:

"Section 59-592, New York University Ambulance Company, U. S. A. A. S., is now officially attached to the French Army," I said in this letter, two badly written sheets that were dispatched through the civilian mail. "Wherever our division, one of the most famous fighting divisions in the whole of the Army, goes, we follow. Short stories and long stories, articles and books, poems and brief paragraphs have been written about the *poilus* of this division, and I am confident that they will hold a permanent place in the war writings of the world. For they turned back the Huns at the Marne. They were at Ypres. And their life-blood was spilled at Verdun. They have been at numerous other places, too, places made famous and never-to-be-forgotten by the biggest battles of this war.

"And to think that we are a part of that division. Does that not sound like Adventure?"

Well, *this was* Adventure—from the weary hills of Lorraine to those blood-drenched lowlands far up in Flanders. I met Adventure at every turn of the road. Too, I saw the sort of stuff that Men are made of, and marveled. . . . Brave little Frenchmen, you who were my comrades and who did not so much as complain of all the hurt you were suffering when your torn and broken bodies were given into my care, again I salute you!

August, 1919. I have come home to the far Summer-brown hills of San Rafael. But already I am weary, restless.

In this town are some good people who would have me talk only of war. Is it not enough that my body is thin and tired? And that out of that cataclysm I brought a sectional citation and a letter of felicitation, with each of them carrying the signature of a famous French general? And that as an explanation of why I took so long a time returning home I hold a certificate of attendance from the University of Lyons in southern France? Will not front-line photographs and newspaper interviews describe my errand of mercy? So much at unrest am I by October, I have decided to go out again on the long, long trail—back to my sunny, green islands so far down underneath the line.

And then A. S. H. writes to me again.

"Here's luck to you!" he says in his letter of October 16, 1919. "Glad you've got the chance to go to the South Seas. I'd sure like to go myself. . . . Here's all kinds of luck to you!"

(A. S. H., could I have sailed with a companion to those far-out beaches of French Oceania, I would have wanted you for that regular fellow. Since that time, however, I have purchased for myself part of a valley on the island of Tahiti. So that some drab mid-afternoon, when you are sitting "twelve stories high above a great city," you will respond to that call of the red gods by spreading all canvas for the merry Polynesian house of doors and windows that I shall build beside a singing river this very year, won't you?)

To this hour I am not done with writing of the happy vagabond days that were at last at hand.

Such days! Three hundred and sixty-five days of warm, blue seas and low-lying atolls and tall, green coco-palms that talked far on into the windy sundown. Indeed, these were the sweet, kind days I so desperately begged from the god of all adventure one fearful Belgium night. Until one has glimpsed with his own eyes the islands of the Marquesas, the Paumotus and the Society group, he can never fully appreciate the unearthly beauty and the abandonment of all care with which these days were filled. It was this sensing of island beauty and island ease of mind that urged me two years later to go back to Tahiti and buy the heart of a sea-green valley.

But to paragraph those vagabond days. Strange and familiar beaches were ever calling. Up and down the island world I drifted in little cutters and canoes, and came to call beach men and women by their first names. Sometimes I broke bread with a chief in the shade of his own veranda. While there were nights when I carried a flaming torch and a spear along a foam-sprayed reef with the humblest of fishermen.

Again, came mornings when, in the four o'clock cool—before the sun came riding back from "east of dawn"—my brown hill companions showed me an islander's way of bringing wild pig-meat home from the upper brush and beneath the white Southern Cross, by the ancient graves of two whalemen on the coral strand at Bora-Bora, flower-garlanded youths and maidens taught me a dance that not all the Government officials and missionaries laboring in these blue semi-pagan seas will ever succeed in suppressing entirely—the hula-hula. Oh, I tell you, through all this period of glorious wandering I communed daily with a god whose name is Content.

It was not until the Summer of 1920 that I rented a house in Papeete, Tahiti, and settled long enough to help launch the *South Seas News* and Pictorial Syndicate. Of this wonder child I shall write nothing. Suffice it to say that up in the big cities "above the line" men were far more interested in the aftermath of war and squeezing profits out of their neighbors. Within four months the little one was dead of infantile paralysis.

By November, 1920, I was again in California, and, in addition to writing fiction, was breaking ground in a new field of endeavor. I had become an "Ask Adventure" editor.

Now to me this editorship means everything. It has placed me where I can be of genuine service to my fellow man and woman. Well, to date I have advised several hundred. Some of these men purchased profitable coconut lands in the far South Seas. Other men have gone out to work on large plantations. While quite a few—men of wealth and position, men who have grown tired of the city's parade—are now wandering, regardless of time and money, through a mystic island world. Too, I have saved a legion of less fortunate men from stranding "on the beach." It is when I remark these tangible results that I see how vital a part "Ask Adventure" is playing in the reshaping of human lives

Just one thing more, another milestone. February 12, 1921, is the time, and Glen Ellen, in the "Valley of the Moon," the place.

To this beautiful shrine I have come to pay a debt of undying gratitude to the memory of that greatest adventurer of us all, Jack London—to whom I am so much indebted for what I am today. I am speaking in Mayflower Hall, where this meeting of love and tribute is being held under the auspices of the Woman's Improvement Club of Glen Ellen, with my boyhood friend, Mrs. Robert Potter Hill, of Eldridge, Calif., presiding. The subject of my informal talk is "In the Wake of the *Snark*."

I tell these Jack London neighbors and friends about the weird and far-out South Sea beaches to which he and his wife sailed in a frail little boat. One thing I stress is that in all my South Sea vagabonding I did not hear of a life spoiled because of Jack London's island writings. Ever he was careful to write only the truth.

And on the following day—at an informal luncheon, with Mrs. Jack London the hostess and me a guest—the little woman who so many times braved the long, perilous trail with her husband of daring told me that he never wrote of anything which he himself had not experienced. Mrs. London knew of no exception to this rule.

Fellow adventurers, I thank you for listening in!

—CHARLES BROWN, JR.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Note from an "A. A." Man

JUST a line from E. E. Harriman, who as we all know, is affectionately referred to by his friends as "Big Jim:"

Los Angeles, Calif.

I agree with you that "Ask Adventure" is useful. Just look at the case of Bob Hurwitz. In 1916 he lived in Hartford, Conn., and cursed city life. I told him how to get a job on a ranch in Montana, and four months later he wrote that he followed my advice and landed right. Jan. 26th he marched in on me to thank me personally.—"BIG JIM."

Settling in Alaska

THE subjoined monograph, printed on hard paper, may be obtained without charge upon application to its author, Mr. T. S. Solomons, Larkspur, Calif. Be sure to enclose a self-addressed envelop and two cents in stamps, *not* attached:

IN GENERAL it is difficult to advise men as to where to go in Alaska for prospecting, homesteading or trapping, or for general working purposes. It must be plain on reflection that if there were "best" places that fact would be known to others as soon as I could know it, and there would be a current of men setting into such places which would soon convert them into "worst places." Work and mine conditions change constantly with the varying fortunes of the general mining industry and of the minor industries and businesses which depend on mining. Settlements grow and decline; the population, sparse everywhere in Alaska, shifts with these changes, and only going up there, after carefully inquiring as to conditions before taking the boat at Seattle, will enable an intending settler for working or mining purposes to determine on the best place to go.

The settler for agricultural purposes, however, is in a little better situation, for it is the unchangeable land he is principally interested in, and his present or future market; and these are matters of knowledge and calculation. Yet there too it is difficult to advise as to location because the country varies so much in its climate, scenery, resources and the kind of agriculture or ranching to which it is adapted. Even the agriculturist, then, ought to go up there and familiarize himself with the conditions before he chooses a region in which to homestead.

Except that the Pacific side of the country, or southern Alaska, offers now the best field, little can be said safely as to any exact "best" location for farming or ranching; and it must be understood that the market for products, except in the immediate vicinity of settlements—small and far between as yet—is a matter of the future, and the greatest single question the contemplating settler faces is how to calculate where and when and how that market is to come.

I therefore uniformly advise those writing to me for general information as to living and working in Alaska to go up there, preferably to southern Alaska near the railroad, or to any point in central Alaska, without other than purely personal outfit, weighing but a few pounds, and with his money tight in his pocket, preferably in the form of exchange, and decide gradually what he wants to do and where he wants to do it. Men's tastes and aptitudes differ as widely as the localities and conditions in Alaska differ, and no single letter from you could make your differences plain to me, nor any single letter from me make the Alaskan variations plain to you. I can only advise you to go if you are footloose and know you have the patience, stamina and general character for the winning of success in a country of magnificent future possibilities.

I also advise that mining is a good business but that prospecting is an exceptionally poor one, and that trapping profitably is very undependable, so many being at it. Yet, by going great distances and working hard, that too may be made profitable. I always suggest obtaining the publications of the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior, Washington, D. C., gratis. They give maps and general information that are entirely reliable.—Theodore S. Solomons.

Life in Tahiti

AN ISLAND which evidently is run on the theory that "the best government is the least government:"

Question:—"There has always been somewhat of a glamour about the South Sea Islands.

I am at loose ends and want to get away from myself. Am wondering if any of these islands would be pleasant to live in. And have you any idea as to the income required to live in a modest way for a single man? Tell me something about the people and reasons for and against living there.

You know what sort of information I am after. Please do not publish my name in *Adventure*."— ——— ———, New Harbor, Me.

Answer, by Mr. C. Brown, Jr.:—To live in a modest way in Tahiti, the most delightful of all South Sea islands, one should have an income of at least $45 a month. Tahiti, which is the capital of the Society Islands, is the very last stand of personal liberty; that is to say, this island is one place in the world where a man can *live* as a white man should live, providing he lives up to the very few laws laid down by the jovial Frenchmen. Indeed, life on this French possession is very kind to the man who can feel assured of a regular income. But John Whiteman should not go there with the expectation of finding a job; there isn't any such animal on the island.

The Tahitians are the best sports in the South Seas. Most of them like to stay up until three o'clock in the morning.

You should read "Mystic Isles of the South Seas," by Frederick O'Brien. This book, which is a whale of a book, is published by the Century Company, New York City.

Books on Swords and Fencing

AN INTERESTING old weapon that crowns its long career by evoking a bibliography which it would be hard to find elsewhere:

Question:—"I'm very sorry to bother you with what may be, perhaps, a foolish question, but, you see, I know nothing about edged weapons, and so I must seek information from higher authorities.

I have enclosed a drawing of a sword, supposed to have been used in the Revolutionary War. It has been in the family for several generations, and I would like to know its variety and probable age.

The blade is two-edged, twenty-six inches long, and one and one-quarter inch wide at the hilt. It gradually tapers down from there to within a half-inch of the point, where it is five-eighths of an inch wide, and then suddenly goes to a point.

The 'handle' of the hilt is of wood (seems to be walnut) and at its greatest width has a circumference of three and a half inches. The remainder of the hilt is brass. Its length 'over all' is thirty-two and three-quarter inches, and the weight is about three pounds."—Francis J. Lammer, 3rd, Philadelphia, Pa.

"P.S.—Is there any book extant which deals with the development of weapons, or contains information about weapons, 'past and present,' (as *Adventure* would have it)? Kindly tell me if there is, and where it may be obtained, so that I may be enabled to stop 'pestering' you with trivial questions."

Answer, by Mr. Barker:—You need have no feeling of regret at applying to me for information. That is what the magazine purports to do, and I am always glad to disseminate any knowledge that I may have, although my engagements are such that it is seldom that I am able to reply as quickly as this.

The sword that you send me a sketch of is apparently a French dress sword of the period of Louis XV (1715—1774). It is the sort of sword that gentlemen of the time wore every day, and would not ordinarily be used in warfare, although some non-commissioned officers, then and later (even as late as the Civil War) wore a somewhat similar one.

Probably the best book on weapons, generally, is "An Illustrated History of Arms and Armour from the Earliest Period to the Present Time." (With nearly 2000 illustrations—line drawings) by Auguste

Demmin. Published by George Bell & Sons, York Street, Covent Garden, London, 1877.

It is excellent and complete, down to hand firearms, to which latter subject it devotes only about 30 pages out of 600. On the latter, there is Major Pollard's "Book of the Pistol," and Prof. Chas. Winthrop Sawyer's several books on "Firearms in American History," being Vol. I (General), Vol. II (The Revolver), Vol. III (Our Rifles,) and a small paper-covered book on "United States Martial Pistols." Such of these as are not out of print may be obtained of Mr. Sawyer, by writing him at his address, 41 Humphreys St., Boston, Mass.

I am subjoining a list of books on swords and the art of fence: "A Complete Bibliography of the Art of Fence." (261 pp.) By Carl Albert Thimms. Pub. London, F. Thimms & Co. 1891. "Secrets of the Sword." By Baron Cæser de Bazancourt. Pub. London. Bell. 1900. "Fencing. Exposition of the Art of Foils and Sabre." By Edward Breck. Pub. N. Y. American Sports Co. 1902. "The Modern Fencer." By Thomas Griffiths. Pub. London. Warner & Co. 1888. "Treatise on Fencing" (181 pp). By George Roland. Pub. Edinburgh 1825. "Fencing." By Walter H. Pollock. Pub. London. Longmans, Green & Co. 1897. "Old Sword Play." By Alfred Hutton. Pub. Lord, Grevel & Co. 1892. "Foil and Sabre. A Grammar of Fencing in Detailed Lessons." (1854). By Louis Randelle. Pub. Estes & Lauriat. Boston. 1892. "Fencing." "Savilio Vincentio, His Practise." (In 2 books). By Saviole Vincentio. Pub. London. Wolfe, 1595. "Fencing Bibliography." By Edgerton Castle. Pub. London. 1897. "Schools and Masters of Fence." From the Middle Ages to the End of the 18th Century. By Edgerton Castle. Pub. London. Bell. 1893. "The Art of Attack." Being a Study in the Development of Weapons and Appliances of Offense. By H. S. Cowper, F.S.A., Pub. Ulverston W. Holmes, Lit. 1906. "The Swordsman." A Manual of Fence for Foil, Sabre and Bayonet. (126p) By Alfred Hutton. Pub. London. H. Grevel & Co. 1891. "The Sword and the Centuries." By Alfred Hutton. Pub. London. Richards. 1901. "The Book of the Sword." By Richard F. Burton. Pub. London. 1884.

The last two would be the best for your purpose, and I should advise trying Scribners in New York to get them.

There is no book with hundreds of illustrations of weapons, and such as there are are not to be obtained at moderate prices.

Brazil-Nuts

ONE of the few food-products that have never been domesticated:

Question:—"If possible give me the following information:

Would, in your opinion, Brazil-nuts grow in Mississippi Gulf Coast country?

How old are Brazil-nut trees before they begin to bear?

What is average yield per tree at yearly intervals as its age increases?

Does U. S. Government permit those trees to be imported into this country?

Would the nuts we buy in this country, if planted, produce bearing trees?

Please omit name and address if you publish."—S. T. J.

Answer, by Mr. Barbour:—I have your letter asking about growing Brazil-nuts in the Gulf Coast country.

In my opinion they would not grow there. Their natural range in Brazil is the Amazon drainage, not over ten degrees north and south of the equator, about the same range as rubber.

The trees begin to bear at about fifteen years and continue for a very long period. The tree gets to be one hundred and fifty feet high and three to five feet thick.

I can give you no data on average yield per tree, as all the nuts are gathered by the natives in the jungle, and to the best of my knowledge no investigative work has ever been done as to yields, etc. The tree is never, or has never been, cultivated in orchards as you cultivate pecans.

There are very strict regulations against importing plants into the United States. They have to pass a special quarantine to avoid bringing in plant diseases.

It might be interesting to plant several nuts in a green house, keeping them well watered, and see if they would germinate. I do not believe they would stand the Winters out of doors.

You might write the Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. Dept. of Agriculture, Washington, to see if they have any information.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Make Your Questions Specific

SUCH questions as the subjoined need not be answered by the "A.A." expert. See Rule 4, printed on page 185 in the blackest type in the office:

Question:—"I am a senior at high school, and I wish to obtain all information possible on Japan—commerce, politics, people, customs, history, travel, art, curios and religion.

I enclose ten two-cent stamps for postage."—GEORGE W. CALHOUN, East Boston, Mass.

Answer, by Mrs. Knudson:—You give me so large an order, in your letter of inquiry through the "Ask Adventure" service, that I fear I could fill it adequately only by writing a book—and there are already so many good volumes on the subject of Japan! I am going to suggest that you visit your public library and see what it can furnish you upon this fascinating country, for I know you will enjoy reading one or more such books. Meantime I will touch very lightly upon the topics you enumerate.

Commerce. The commercial importance of Japan has steadily increased from about 1882 until the present time. The country has a well-organized and highly equipped mercantile marine plying to all countries of the globe and operating under liberal Government navigation and ship-building laws. In 1921 Japan possessed six subsidized steamship companies as well as a large number of smaller carriers engaged chiefly in "tramp" service along the coast at home or in freight business to China, India, Australia, North and South America and Europe. The past two years have seen a big slump in ship-building and in "tramp" commerce, due to the universal trade depression; but despite this slump Japan is "holding her own" with all other countries in commerce.

Politics in Japan has its own peculiarities—as it has in every country. Her political institutions are quite complicated, and the political attitude of her people is unique and somewhat singular. So it is not easy to describe the workings of this Government. The chief institutions in the constitutional system of Japan are the Emperor, the Privy Council, the Cabinet, the Imperial Diet (House of Peers and House of Representatives), the Electorate, the political parties, and the Genro or Elder Statesmen. This last is a distinct peculiarity of Japanese Government—merely a small, unofficial group of older and experienced statesmen; to these men the Emperor turns for advice in case of emergencies.

The Japanese people have determination, courage and enterprise. Their social customs differ from ours in many instances; to the extent that the country has been referred to in the past as "Topsy-turvydom." Their art and religion came to them through China and Korea—as did many of their customs—and both have been adapted to suit the beautiful natural environment and marvelous capacity for development of these interesting Japanese. Their native religion is a mixture of Shinto and Buddhist philosophy. The Christian creeds have many converts there through their many "foreign missions."

Much of Japanese old art and many of its curios are connected with its religion and its temples.

I trust that these suggestions may lead you to profitable reading about Japan.

Summer Resorts of Maine

DAYS like sapphire—unless they're foggy:

Question:—"We must leave New York every Summer from end of May or so to the middle of September.

We must go to a cool place as my husband several years ago had a bad breakdown on account of the heat; and as he is a high-strung, nervous temperament the cooler climates have been better for him.

We have been at Gloucester and Magnolia, Mass.; at York Harbor, Maine, and think we might do better.

We like the ocean—sailing, rowing—outdoor pleasures of any kind; are thought what is called "middle-aged people" (do not feel that way however) and like the more quiet places, not the real pleasure beaches. But we must have some recreation as my husband is a deep thinker and worker. He does some composing and writing during Summer. We have no children.

How and where can I find out about cool spots north of Portland, or even in Canada or Nova Scotia? There must be easy mail connection as my husband must keep in touch with his business here—he is assistant editor of a music journal.

I have been thinking of camps—but the more civilized camps I mean—but find in the average house for rent too little outdoor life. We stayed at small hotels, but music easily interferes with the work of my husband. Last year we had a four-room cottage with one bath and kitchen—a very nice clean house; but Magnolia, Mass., is dead as to boating, sailing, etc. The big private houses own everything there is to own. All we had was the movies twice a week and walks on the main roads, and we had extremely hot spells at times.

I fear my husband will almost want a Paradise because he objects to high winds—and also too much coolness!

Do forgive me troubling you—I would like so much to find a convenient place where we might go for at least a few Summers in succession.

Is it so that Canada is hot in places? Some one said the north coast of Maine north of Portland was so beautiful, but could not say about climatical conditions.

How far north should we go? What has the Gulf Stream to do with it?"—— ———, New York.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—There are many cool and delightful spots on the Maine coast from Kittery to Eastport, where you and your husband could enjoy yourselves from June to September, and I am inclined to think if you should write to Vacation Department of the Maine Central R. R., Portland, Me., they might put you in touch with the right location. There is no end to the number of Summer boarding-places, cottages to let, and private families who take "Summer boarders."

The greatest draw-back we have on the Maine coast is the fog, and in many places the water is rather cold for enjoyable bathing. There is good fishing and boating, and many of the smaller boarding-places are noted for the excellent food they serve.

There are also many very beautiful spots on the inland lakes and ponds, where the hotels and camps give the best of service. This is especially true of the Moosehead Lake and the Rangely Lake region. Nearly all of the hotels and camps have their daily mail, and most of them have running water.

If you have an idea you would like the inland water a request to Mr. Geo M. Houghton, passenger traffic manager of the B. & A. R. R., Bangor, Me., with ten cents stamps enclosed, will bring you a copy of the book, "In the Maine Woods" which will give you much valuable information about that section of the State, with a list of camps and hotels, rates, etc. If I have not given you definite information enough write again.

Preserving Minnows

HOW to keep the early bait fresh till the real fishing begins later on:

Question:—"I would like to know the composition of the solution used to preserve minnows for bait purposes. I suspect that formaldehyde is used, but at present lack the facilities for making an analysis, although I am a chemist.

In our many Minnesota lakes the minnows are plentiful early in the Spring, but hard to find when the real fishing begins. I have used the preserved minnows found in the sporting-goods stores with success and would like to try my hand at canning them."—C. E. Roe, Hibbing, Minn.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—For preserving minnows use a ten-per-cent. solution of water and formaldehyde. The best advice in the matter is, do the work of putting the minnows in the solution the instant that they are caught. In this manner their color and scales are preserved better than in any other way.

For a short time they also can be preserved in a very heavily impregnated salt brine, but they are very much inclined to become very hard from this method and often so brittle that they are not so good as when kept in the first-advised manner.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

THE request for versions of outlaw songs and ballads has brought to the department a mass of really worth-while material. In several cases correspondents have been able to furnish texts that appear to be almost contemporary with the incidents on which they were based and have been able to add bits of information about the events themselves.

The value of such information to the student of American folk-song can not be overestimated. It is not enough for him to have a copy of each song, or even many copies. If he is to succeed in tracing the growth and development of folk-song, he must be able to follow this growth from start to finish. He should know first of all just what happened.

Curiously enough, most songs, although based on real characters and real events, do not stick closely to the truth. They borrow incidents from other songs, they tell what should have happened in a given situation rather than what did happen, they become changed to fit a new hero by a mere change of name.

The songs of Jesse James illustrate many of these peculiarities. With remarkable fidelity they stick to the fact in the chorus—

"Bob Ford's pistol ball knocked him tumbling from the wall,
And they laid Jesse James in his grave."

But the following verse seems to be either pure fancy or an adaptation from some other story—

"Jesse went to the depot, not many days ago,
And there he did something he never did before;
He got down on his knees and delivered up the keys
Of the banks that he'd robbed long ago."

And in other verses where Jesse is characterized as one who "robbed the rich to give unto the poor" it seems clear that the romantic tradition of Robin Hood and of Dick Turpin has been at work.

A VERY complete and early version of "McAffee's Confession" has been sent in by Mr. F. E. Wade, of Richland Center, Wis. In his letter Mr. Wade says: "My grandfather, George Fruit, was present at McAffee's execution. Many times when a small boy I have heard grandfather sing this song. I am sending you a copy of it as it was handed down to me."

McAffee's Confession

Draw near, young men, and learn of me
My sad and mournful history,
And may you ne'er forgetful be
Of all this day I tell to thee.

Before I reached my fifth year
My father and my mother dear
Were both laid in their silent graves
By Him Who them their being gave.

No more a father's voice I heard;
No more a mother's love I shared;
No more was I a father's joy—
I was a helpless orphan boy.

But Providence, the orphan's friend,
A kind relief did quickly send,
And snatched from want and penury
Poor little orphan McAffee.

Then to my uncle's friendly roof,
From want and danger far aloof,
Nine years was I most kindly reared
And of his kind advice I heard.

But I was thoughtless, young and gay
And ofttimes broke the Sabbath day;
In wickedness I took delight
And ofttimes did what was not right.

And when my uncle would me chide
I'd turn from him dissatisfied,
And fain again my wickedness
And Satan serve with eagerness.

At last arrove that fatal day
When from my home I ran away,
And to my sorrow, once in life,
I took unto myself a wife.

But she was kind and good to me
As any woman need to be,
And would have been alive no doubt
Had I ne'er seen Miss Hettie Shout.

Ah, well I mind the fatal day
When Hettie stole my heart away;
It was love for her that controlled my will
And caused me my wife to kill.

It was on one pleasant Summer night
When all was still; the moon shone bright;
My wife was lying on the bed
When I approached to her and said:

"Dear wife, here is medicine I've brought
Which out of town this day I bought.
My dear, I know it will cure you
Of those vile fits; pray take it, do."

She gave to me a tender look
And in her mouth the poison took,
And by her baby on the bed
Down to her last long sleep she laid.

But, fearing that she was not dead,
Upon her throat my hands I laid
And there such deep impressions made
Her soul soon from her body fled.

Oh, then my heart was filled with wo.
I cried: "Oh, whither shall I go?
How can I quit this mournful place?
This world again how can I face?"

I'd freely give all my store
If I had a thousand pounds or more
If I could bring again to life
My dear, my darling murdered wife!

Her body's now beneath the sod;
Her soul, I hope, is with its God,
As soon into eternity
My guilty soul will also be.

The minute is drawing nigh
When from this world my soul shall fly
To meet Jehovah at His bar
And there my final sentence hear.

Young men, young men, be warned by me!
Pray shun all evil company;
Walk in the way of righteousness,
And God your soul will surely bless.

Dear friends, I bid you all adieu.
I shall no more on earth see you,
But in Heaven's bright and flowery plain
I hope to meet you all again.

I am much interested in obtaining further information about this song. Some of the verses seem to be purely conventional—the last three for example—and can probably be found in other songs of the same general type. The sixteenth verse with its mention of a thousand pounds seems to indicate a borrowing from an English source. Who was McAfee? When and where did he live? With what accuracy is his crime described? Was Hettie Shout, or Hattie Stout, a real character? In how many versions—such as those printed by Lomax and by Finger—are the dead father and mother brought in incongruously at the trial?

SEND all contributions of old songs and all questions about them direct to R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif. DO NOT send them to the magazine.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JUNE 30TH ISSUE

The next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

PEARL HUNGER A Five-Part Story Part I
Lust for Treasure in the South Seas. *Gordon Young*

OUT OF THE FLOOD A Complete Novel *W. C. Tuttle*
Cowpunchers and hold-ups.

THE WOLF OF THE MOUNTAIN A Complete Novelette
Silvain de St. Lo and the robber-baron. *H. C. Bailey*

A MAN FOR THE JOB *John Webb*
"One-Two" Mac fills a breach.

THE BRIDGE *Georges Surdez*
Peller made an enemy without knowing it.

NECKLACES AND DAN WHEELER A Four-Part Story Conclusion
The fight in the consulate basement. *John I. Cochrane*

THE HORSE OF DESTINY *James Parker Long*
Wild blood in the training-stables.

A PARTNER FOR GOGO *Clyde B. Hough*
An unwilling one, at that.

THE BLOOD TRAIL *William Byron Mowery*
The coming of the fair-headed invaders.

Still Farther Ahead

THE three issues following the next will contain *long stories* by Leonard H. Nason, William Ashley Anderson, J. D. Newsom, A. D. H. Smith, Frederick Moore, Walter J. Coburn, Gordon MacCreagh, George E. Holt and Charles Victor Fischer; and short stories by Barry Scobee, John Webb, Royce Brier, William Byron Mowery, Warren Hastings Miller, W. C. Tuttle, Thomson Burtis, Magruder Maury, F. St. Mars, Raymond S. Spears and others; stories of Yankee cavalrymen in the World War, squatters in the Australian cow-country, conspirators in Abyssinia, Mexican revolutionaries on the Border, hard-case skippers on the Atlantic, prospectors on the American desert, fur-hunters in Labrador, Chinese bandits in the South Seas, viking-farers in prehistoric America, doughboys in the Philippines, desert-riders in Morocco, treasure-hunters in Peru, aviators on the Rio Grande, smugglers in Chinese waters, adventurers the world around.

Take a Kodak with you

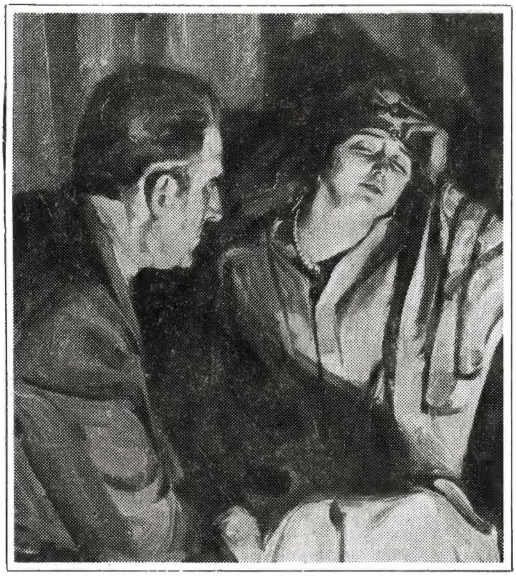
You'd like to remember a day like this and pictures won't let you forget.

Any Kodak is convenient to carry, easy to work and fun to use; you'll get good pictures from the first.

Autographic Kodaks *$6.50 up*
At your dealer's

Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N.Y., *The Kodak City*

"Where is the Pain? . . ."



"Eh? Well, all right, but you ought to have called me earlier. Peritonitis may have set in."

"A small boy whose memory is of being awakened by his father's talking to a patient, down at the door; of catching these sleepy 3 A.M. phrases. A small boy who was permitted to peep at anatomical charts and ponderous medical books in "the office." Then his brother going off to medical school—gossip of classes, of a summer's internship, of surgery versus general practise. And behind father and brother, a grandfather and uncle who were also doctors.

". . . With such a background, the work and ideals of doctors have always been more familiar to me than any others, and when I began to write novels I thought of some day having a doctor hero . . ."

says SINCLAIR LEWIS

the world-famed author of

"MAIN STREET" *and* "BABBITT"

". . . Part of that ambition was satisfied in *Dr. Kennicott* of 'Main Street,' but he was not the chief character, and furthermore, I desired to portray a more significant medico than *Kennicott*—one who should get beneath routine practise into the scientific foundation of medicine—one who should immensely effect all life."

During the two years since he finished "Babbitt," Sinclair Lewis has been working on such a story with its doctor hero—"Dr. Martin Arrowsmith." Now it is ready and will be presented to the public in THE DESIGNER magazine, starting with the June issue.

"DR. MARTIN ARROWSMITH"
latest novel by
SINCLAIR LEWIS
author of
"MAIN STREET"
and "BABBITT"
is now appearing in
THE DESIGNER

THE DESIGNER

15c a copy
$1.50 a year

Order your subscription to-day from

THE DESIGNER PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., NEW YORK